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To Miss Jane Seaman of Music,
with the Author's best Regards.

THE MARDENS,

AND

THE DAVENTRYS.

TALES,

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"TRAITS AND TRADITIONS OF PORTUGAL,"

&c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON

SAUNDERS AND OTLEY, CONDUIT STREET.

1835.

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TO

MRS. JOHN HARMAN,

AS A SINCERE TOKEN

OF

FRIENDSHIP AND AFFECTION,

THESE VOLUMES ARE INSCRIBED

BY

THE AUTHOR.

Bradenham Lodge, Bucks.
Jan., 1835.

Gen Res Room 9 Dow 59 Holl. rec'd 3 v. 14 Dec 59 Morr. 11

THE MARDENS.

" It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augurs, that understood relations, have
By magpies, and by choughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.—What is the night?"

MACBETH.

THE MARDENS.

CHAPTER I.

It was a bright evening in autumn; one of those glorious sun-sets where the rich tints of the western clouds seem to throw into still broader beauty the varying colours of the forest foliage, and to clothe the earth in a panoply of splendour: the scene was beautiful—a cone-like hill, feathered even to its summit with stately trees; clumps of ash and elm, majestic oaks stretch-

ing their wide and shadowy arms far across the green sward, and groupes of the weeping birch waving in the wind its fragile and feathery boughs—here and there a stately chesnut tree broad and bright in the sinking light—and at intervals a trembling aspin turning up the snowy lining of its leaves to the breeze in which they shivered; this was the rich background of the picture; while on either side a stately park swept far into the distance, its soft undulations of surface, relieving and deluding the eye into the belief that it was of almost boundless extent.

The house stood, or rather nestled, under the shadow of the hill; it was a square, solid, substantial structure of stone, undistinguished by any beauty of design, or architectural elaboration. A broad flight of steps led up to the principal entrance, and the wide doors fell back so vastly as to impart an air of stateliness even to their simplicity. Involuntarily, as the eye rested upon Marden Hall, the mind in

seeking to pourtray its days of splendour, reverted to other and earlier times; and the impression was a correct one; where herds of stately deer had once swept through the sunny glades, or clustered in the shadows of the tall trees, flocks of sheep, and groupes of milch cows now broused quietly on the sweet herbage; and the curious eye might detect through many a vista, patches of corn ripe for the sickle, and small stretches of land whereon were reared clover, mangel-wurzel, and other crops calculated to supply food for cattle. These were, indeed, skilfully fenced off from the main park, and so disposed as to be altogether invisible from the house; though on traversing the road which led to it, and which, although partially bordered by chesnut and beech trees, was yet too open at intervals to be strictly denominated an avenue, the eye rested occasionally on the rich corn-patches which stood out gay and golden, in striking relief from the fresh grass-land by which they were surrounded.

As it neared the house, the road wound abruptly through a thick shrubbery of evergreens, its direct line being broken by a small lake, upon whose surface floated a pair of those majestic birds of whom it has been said by Wordsworth, that they

Swim double, swan and shadow;

while patches of the undulating lotus opened their waxen blossoms to the light, upborne upon their leafy canopy; and the banks were fringed by pensile willows, and the most rare and beautiful flowering shrubs.

Such was the scene to which the last touch of beauty was supplied by the appearance of two figures, that suddenly emerged from the shelter of the dense shrubbery to which allusion has been already made, and stood out in the rich light upon the margin of the lake. They were those of an aged man, and a fair girl upon whose arm he was fondly leaning. There was something strikingly fine and prepossessing in the countenance of the father, for that

he was such might be detected at a glance; his ample forehead, his bright eye, the benevolent expression of that most speaking feature, the mouth, and the air of quiet dignity which pervaded his whole appearance, irresistibly won upon the heart. His companion possessed all these personal attributes, heightened and softened by her youth, her sex, and her timidity; her cheek was pale, very pale, but like the hedge-rose, the slightest breath would flush it;—her eyes, like those of her parent, were large and dark, but the habitual sparkle which lit up the looks of the old man was so mellowed down in the glances of his daughter that you felt, as you gazed upon her, as though the light was slumbering in the depths of those sweet eyes, and that only by violent emotion could it be awakened. There was a gentle and feminine repose in the countenance of the fair girl, which contrasted beautifully with the energetic mobility of the old man's features; and as they stood beside the still water, the dark

hair of the maiden floating in the evening air, and the benign countenance of her parent resting upon her with that look of love so peculiar to a parental eye, they were a study for a painter.

"Look, Mary," said the old gentleman, "your pets are crowding all sail to greet you; but I fear that on this occasion you will prove a strangely unwelcome visitor, for you have nothing to bestow."

"Now, fye upon you, my dear father," smiled his companion; "think you that my favorites mete out their affection so selfishly?—poor Dido!" she continued, as the magnificent swan, attracted by her voice, sailed slowly towards her; "how stately she looks this evening—naughty bird!—she has broken off a blossom from my lotus yonder with her wing; so much for vanity, Dido; how reckless it makes one of extraneous mischief."

"Does it indeed, my Mary?" Asked her father, a sudden shadow gathering upon his

brow; "and where learnt my little girl so worldly a truth? Could it be from experience?"

The question, although complicated, was common-place enough; and yet the blush of the daughter responded to the gloom of the father; as, after a moment's pause, he pursued the subject more tangibly.

"Can it indeed be that same vanity which has taught this unreasoning bird to destroy a flower, and my rational child to break a heart?"

"My *dear* Father—"

"Listen to me, Mary: you were too young, if not to feel, at least to appreciate your loss, when you saw me follow to the grave my angel wife: you knew not, you could not know, all that she had been; only in my undying affection, an affection which death itself can never diminish—in the prayers and blessings which the neighbouring poor yet shower down upon her name; in the respect and regret with which all who knew and loved her still hallow her memory, can you picture to yourself your

gentle mother; consumption robbed me of her; the light was yet in her eye, the bloom still upon her cheek, when they told me that I had no longer a wife—alas! to that very light, to that very bloom, had I looked as to my day-star of hope! Since that time you have been everything to me—wife, and child, and world; in your girlhood you were my only plaything: now, Mary, you are my most cherished friend; do you wonder then that I look jealously to my treasure? That every doubt is to me a pang? Do you not guess, my love, what I would ask?"

"I do, I do;" murmured Mary almost in a whisper; "yet I am not to blame, dear father, indeed I am not."

"I believe you, my fair child, and yet—"

"Nay, nay; you shall not doubt—am I not your own Mary? and think you that I would deceive a love like yours? Father, I am content to live thus for ever: I know that you are less wealthy than your ancestors, but we are

not therefore the less dear to each other—what do we want with gold? Are not all these noble trees our own? These hills, and glades, this quiet happy roof, our home? What do we require more? The very name of Marden carries a charm with it—I care not to resign that name, dear father."

"And Reginald Daubigny, Mary?"

"Surely you did not speak of him!" exclaimed the maiden, her eye suddenly lighting up with an expression of unutterable relief.

"And of whom then thought you that I spoke?" was the surprized enquiry.

"We will talk no more of vanity just now, dear father;" interposed the fair girl, with a blush which overspread brow, cheek, and bosom; "it is really a profanation, when the nightingales are singing so sweetly; and it is becoming somewhat chilly too;" she added, with a slight shudder: "therefore we should do well to remember that our heads are uncovered, and that the evening dews are unwholesome."

As she spoke, she playfully drew the hand of her astonished and bewildered father within her own, and led the way back to the house. Whether Mr. Marden would have resumed the subject cannot be decided, for ere he had recovered from his surprize at the unwonted manner of his daughter, a servant met them to announce that Mr. Daubigny was in the library.

"My head aches strangely:" said Mary; "perhaps, dear father, as you have a companion, you will excuse me for a while; I will rejoin you when you again need society."

"I hope that you have not taken cold in reality:" said the old gentleman anxiously: "go, my love, and consult Mrs. Williams; she is a good nurse, and not a bad doctress: if you should be better, come down, for I know that Daubigny will be disappointed should he not see you, and poor Honoria will fancy that you are becoming cruel." And the fond father affectionately patted the soft cheek which burnt beneath his touch.

But the head-ache of Mary led her not to consult with the comely old housekeeper; it was a sudden attack, for which she well knew that the worthy Mrs. Williams could offer no effectual remedy; and, having hastily tied on her cottage bonnet, and thrown her shawl over her shoulders, she once more left the house.

There was a sweet, retired spot at some distance in the grounds which had been a favorite haunt of one of the former mistresses of Marden; a family tradition, breathing love and happiness, was connected with "The Rosery," as the recess was called; and the gardeners at the Hall had been accustomed to tend with peculiar care the shrubs and flowers of this lovely little retreat. To Mary the spot was peculiarly attractive; it was so still, so shady, and so sweet, that all her thoughts had hitherto been happy ones as she lingered among the bright blossoms, and busied herself in twining the long branches of the creeping rose into a hundred fanciful devices; the bees

and the birds were alike partial to that lovely nook ; for where the trees were scant, the sunshine lay warm and glowing on the rich grass and the sweet flowers ; and a marble basin, in which fleets of gold and silver fish were disporting themselves, and turning their glittering scales to the light, threw up, from a cup which resembled the blossom of the lotus, a silvery thread of water, which fell back with a soft and soothing sound into the reservoir ; and at intervals along its edge a kneeling nymph, exquisitely chisselled, appeared in the very act of dipping her urn into the limpid water,—no wonder that one so gentle as Mary loved the Rosery ; its associations and its locality were alike attractive ; and as she sauntered slowly within its boundary, she had been used to nurse quiet thoughts, and those soft imaginings which are so peculiar to the fresh morning of existence—those mental links which the world wrenches so rudely asunder, and which are so unequal to the con-

tact of a selfish and calculating meridian. Hitherward, on this bright evening, did Mary bend her solitary way; a smile was indeed upon her lip, for it knew not a more harsh expression; but the smile was less sunny than that which it was wont to wear; and there was a slight, a very slight shade upon her fair young brow, which deepened its beauty into thought.

"Reginald Daubigny," she mused: "has told me that he loves me—*me!*—the daughter of a ruined house: the last of a proud race, whose very name will perish with my poor life—I ought to be grateful for such a love; I feel—I know, that I should be so; and yet, I cannot——a cold son, and a stern brother, must be an alien to my heart, nursed as I have been in gentleness and affection; I cannot love Reginald Daubigny. Let him seek a more willing bride; why should he waste his best feelings upon me? He reminded me, too, of his wealth—surely he could not think that the

affections were to be purchased at a price! I am sure that we were not formed for each other—he spurns my simple tastes, he scoffs at my quiet pleasures, he does not seem to comprehend the feelings of my heart; and I, in my turn, shrink from the turbulence and the danger of the pursuits in which he delights. My father encourages his suit—and yet, were I indeed left free to choose, I should not yield up my hand to Daubigny——"

Thus far had the reverie of the maiden progressed, when a quick step upon the path-way caused her to look up. It was not Daubigny, and yet the bright blood flew to her cheek, and the light of joy danced for a moment in her eye, as it fell upon the intruder.

"I scarcely know how to apologise, Miss Marden," commenced a low, sweet voice, "for this intrusion on your privacy; yet as I ever find truth to be my best advocate, I will e'en tell you the simple fact; I have been to visit a sick parishioner, one of your own pensioners,

poor old Martha at the Ivy Lodge, and presuming on the kind permission of Mr. Marden, and being somewhat pressed for time, I have ventured to take the shortest path to my dwelling; had I known that—"

"How have I deserved this laboured apology, Mr. Howard?" asked the young lady, and her voice shook more than was absolutely necessary even to the most timid of her sex on so trifling an occasion: "friends, infinitely less valued and less valuable than you are, avail themselves without scruple of so trifling a privilege:—but did not I understand that old Martha was ill? I will extend my ramble beyond the Rosary, and visit her; she is one of the chroniclers of our family, and we are bound to cherish her accordingly."

The young curate, suddenly forgetting that he had traversed Marden Park with a desire to economize his time, simply bowed, and moved on beside the lady for a while in silence; and during that pause, we will endeavour to sketch

for the reader a portrait of the oblivious young clergyman.

Henry Howard was the only son of a widow, who, in dying, left him friendless and fortuneless to the tender mercies of a world which at the best is but a step-dame. As a boy he had wrestled with his fate, and overcome it; as a man he had learnt to appreciate his misfortune, and to endure it. A chance service rendered to a college associate, had, through the interest of the individual whom he had obliged, procured for him the curacy of the retired village of Marden; and who shall blame the miserable feeling of hopelessness which pervaded the mind and sickened the heart of the young man, as he took possession of his curacy; and conscious (for who that owns them is not so?) of his fine talents, his deep reading, and his powers of oratory, beheld around him only a crowd of simple peasants unable to appreciate either the one or the other? Yet he relaxed not in his duties; he knew that the souls of the un-

learned were as precious in the eyes of his Master as those of the wise; and, ere long, many a blessing was poured upon the head of the young pastor, and his praise was the theme of many a humble hearth. Still Howard was not happy; grateful he was, and he struggled to be content, but he felt that all which he had so long and so laboriously striven to attain was cast back upon him—that he was not understood; that his path of life was so accurately marked out, that for him, beyond the mere simple means of existence, there remained no hope. His very books became distasteful to him; he but widened by study, the gulf which already yawned broad and impassable between himself and his flock: from man he turned to Nature, and here indeed he learnt that the pulses of his heart could yet quicken with delight.

The small village, or rather hamlet of Marden stood in a pleasant valley, surrounded on three sides by hills richly cultivated, and was bounded on the fourth by the extensive

park whence it derived its name; a narrow, but rapid stream traversed the main street (for thus it was termed) of the hamlet; and after reflecting on its clear surface the flaunting sigh of the Marden Arms, where the ambitious host had announced, in the pride of his heart, that he was "licensed to let post horses," (though he possessed not one which was not intimately acquainted with all agricultural duties,) it ultimately served to turn the wheel of a mill, ere it lost itself in several minor streams, which intersected the valley, and then, re-uniting once more, were finally absorbed in the river.

One of Howard's first questions on arriving at his curacy, had naturally been as to the identity of the master of Marden Hall; and he had learnt that "the Squire" was a kind and a good man; not so rich, may be, as his forefathers had been in their time, for the late Squire had been fond of London and London folks, and the cards and the dice-box had exhausted his means—more was the pity for his

son, who was as kind a master, and as good a landlord as any in England, God bless him! But just now Squire Marden was laid up with the gout—(a disease which the honest peasants appeared to consider as much an heir-loom as his broad acres—) and hadn't been much into the village. And this was all; for no civility of any description announced to the humble curate that the master of Marden was even aware of his locality.

Howard asked no question relatively to the crimson-cushioned and roomy pew, immediately beneath his reading-desk in the little white-washed church; nor the many hatchments, all bearing the same escutcheons which clustered closely in its vicinity: he felt at once that it appertained to Mr. Marden; but whether it were from weariness of spirit, from that craving for variety which is so inherent in our nature, or from a mere feeling of curiosity, it is impossible to determine, while it is certain that Howard most devoutly longed for a cessation of the old gen-

tleman's gout. His wishes were at length fulfilled; for sauntering through the church-yard, meditating among the graves on a fine spring evening, he was induced to enter the open door of the sacred edifice; and was strangely interested on discovering that a servant in the Marden livery was busied in assisting his own "official," in dusting, rubbing, and arranging the parlour-like pew of the Squire.

On his entrance the man saluted him respectfully, and informed him that he had procured the key of the Church in order to prepare the family pew for the reception of his master who was greatly recovered, as his young lady was fearful of damp.

There was a young lady then! Howard bent his head hurriedly to the servant, and left the Church. Strange, that no one should have mentioned to him that there was a young lady! And she had been in such close attendance on her sick father, that she had not even——well Howard was glad that the suspense would not

endure long, for the morrow was Sunday. As he reached this point of his reverie, the curate started: this was the first occasion on which self-reproach had ever blended with his secret thoughts. Were these fitting meditations for the sabbath eve? He was rebuked, and entered his humble home in a sadder and a holier spirit.

The morrow came; and the contrition of Howard for his involuntary error was so sincere, that until he mounted his pulpit, he had not turned a single glance towards the Squire's pew. As the children of the village school sang the simple hymn which he had selected for them, however, he looked down upon Mr. Marden and his daughter; the fine, benevolent countenance of the Squire was up-turned to his; he met his eyes, and instantly rivetted his attention on the sermon which lay open before him. The hymn ceased; the prayer was said; and collecting his scattered thoughts, Howard gave out his text; as he turned in the direction of

Mr. Marden's pew, he felt that the eyes of Miss Marden were upon him, but he did not trust himself with a glance; never had he been more eloquent. People may say what they will, but however pure and honest our intents may be, we never put forth all our strength where we are conscious that neither our efforts nor our powers can be appreciated; and thus it was with Howard; he had shewn as much zeal, but he had never exerted so much ability: he had been quite as orthodox, but infinitely less eloquent; there had been as much piety in his discourse, but never so much beauty. And he felt this: he was conscious that he was infusing into his words the best powers of his mind and heart: and for the first time, he acknowledged to himself that he was guilty of no latent supineness, but that he had poured forth his whole soul.

If the young curate was thus alive to the power of his own discourse, what must have been its effect upon two at least of his auditors? Accustomed as they had hitherto been to the

monotonous delivery, the cold, unimpassioned manner of a luke-warm minister, Mr. Marden and his daughter were overwhelmed by the eloquence of Howard; heightened as it was in effect by his singularly elegant appearance, and the intonations of a voice, which was at once firm and musical. When the service was concluded, Mr. Marden still somewhat feeble from his long confinement, lingered for a while in the church porch leaning upon the arm of his daughter, to introduce himself to the young clergyman. In a few minutes Howard appeared, and to his surprize, the extended hand of the Squire greeted him on his approach, while the sweet smile of Mary Marden almost deprived him of sufficient self-possession to offer a suitable reply to the flattering comments of her father.

"We have been sorry neighbours, Mr. Howard;" pursued the old gentleman, as the trio slowly proceeded along the church-yard path, amid the bows and curtseys of the rustic

congregation; "but you must forgive us: a sick man and his nurse, the one cross, and the other weary, would have been but indifferent associates; now however, that Mary and I are once more enabled to play our parts of host and hostess, my skill in physiognomy must have failed me strangely, and my discrimination in character have abandoned me altogether, if you do not prove one of our most welcome guests."

Howard faultered out a reply, but it was somewhat confused, for Mary unfortunately looked towards him at the moment, and smiled a ratification of her father's sudden sentiment.

"You have some trouble in forgiving us, I see:" pursued the old gentleman; "but you must do your best; for you are not a man with whom I can afford to be on bad terms; there now, that's right, I know by your smile that all coolness is over; so help Mary into the carriage, jump in yourself, and I will follow you;

for you must sign our treaty of peace at the dinner-table to day."

Howard obeyed: for a moment the small hand of Miss Marden rested in his; and in the next he was seated by her side.

We have said that this was in the spring: the buds were just bursting; the birds were busy among the boughs; the early flowers had opened their painted blossoms to the sun-shine; and the lowing of the cattle, and the sound of the sheep-bell fell cheerfully upon the ear. The spring passed away: the summer came, rich in its clustering foliage and its thousand flowers: the shadows were longer beneath the trees; the moon-beam fell warmer upon the glades: and then succeeded autumn, golden, gorgeous autumn, when Nature, conscious of her coming decay, puts on her richest garb, and the forest leaves borrow the tint of jewels. Thus had time sped; and Howard had shrunk at the discovery that his every thought, his every dream, was of Mary Marden. There was despair in the

conviction: was she not young, lovely, the last of a long line of ancestry, the heiress of Marden Hall? He accused himself of folly, of madness; but the fact remained unaltered. At least, he resolved that he would bury the secret in his own bosom; that he would not wilfully subject himself to the scorn and the displeasure of her father, and to her own pity. Thus argued Howard, with all the pride and straight-forwardness of an upright mind; and having assured our readers that the young curate was as much in love as a man of five-and-twenty in a secluded village, with a fine mind, a striking person, and warm feelings, thrown into constant communion with a beautiful and well-educated girl could possibly be, we will resume the thread of our narrative, and return to the Rosery.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was a pause:—now, reader, we will venture to hint to you that such a pause resembled greatly the close of a chapter, where the author is somewhat puzzled how to commence the next. Neither the lady nor the gentleman knew very well what to say, though both felt the expediency of resuming the conversation. In such cases, we will undeviatingly trust to feminine tact: the intellect of the man may be more solid, more substantial, and more satisfactory, but commend

us to the ready wit of the woman; man may be the column, but woman is the corinthian capital; the one may boast of its proportion and its durability, but the grace, the fancy, and the ornament, is with the other.

Thus was it here, though Mary Marden was as guileless, as innocent of the tact which sees when to get up "a scene," and when to play sentiment, as any lovely girl reared in such retirement could be; though like the rose which has blossomed in the shade, no garish light had lingered upon her beauty, and she herself knew not its power; she yet felt that it was reserved to her to terminate a silence which a certain consciousness warned her that it was dangerous to encourage. It is a sad truth that a woman's smiles sometimes produce the very evil which her words are designed to avert; and this was Mary's case; she looked so lovely as she turned towards Howard that his breath came thick, and he had some difficulty in listening composedly as she addressed him; and yet the

remark was a very simple one, and little calculated to produce the emotion which in his breast had grown to pain.

" I am foolishly fond of the Rosery, Mr. Howard, as you are aware : and even now my kind father believes that I am shut into my apartment, instead of wandering here amid flowers, and memories scarcely less glowing than they : I never sit beneath these trees, or inhale the perfume of these roses, but I lose myself in dreams of the high-born lady of Marden who has sanctified the spot to her less gifted daughters; and you know not, Mr. Howard, how much my self-appreciation is lessened by the recollection; nor how my self-love is crumbled into dust by the comparison which I involuntarily make—surely even indifferent individuals can scarcely smile at the tenacity with which every one who bears the name of Marden clings to the legend of ' The Rosery.' "

" I never heard the legend," faultered out Howard.

"Why, I could almost quarrel with you for the admission;" smiled Mary; "and I am resolved that you shall never offend again; seat yourself therefore upon this rustic bench at my side, and wretched chronicler though I be, I will instantly initiate you into the mysteries of the Rosery."

In a moment both were seated beneath a superb tulip tree, whose trunk was hidden by the tall shoots of the China rose, and whose branches cast a dense shade far along the green sward; around them were scattered mimic baskets of wrought wire, containing sweet-scented, or bright-tinted flowers; while far away the eye traced the varying foliage of the park timber, or rested on the golden clouds which yet lingered, bearing upon their bosoms the last colours of the descended sun.

"You will not surely be a sceptic *here*;" said Mary playfully. "You dare not—and now for a tale of the olden time"—

The Legend of the Lady Barbara Marden.

The Mardens prided themselves no little on their long descent when the second Charles held his Court in France; and Peregrine Marden, untitled though he was, became a member of that mimic court. He was a gay and reckless cavalier, affecting to hold women as toys, and constancy as a spent bubble: handsome withal, and vain, as men ever are, (so Martha tells me) when they know that bright eyes rest upon them. But Marden's great virtue with the dissolute and misled Prince was his wealth; which, compounded as the royal circle then was of the needy and the rapacious, was beyond all appreciation. Suffice it that when Charles, on his return to England, established his Court at Woodstock, Marden had exhausted all his pecuniary resources, and that even the paternal estate was deeply mortgaged. It might have been fancy, but Peregrine adopted a belief that, as he began to reveal his utter incapacity to continue the course of uncalculating profusion which

had led him freely to supply every want, however puerile, of the selfish and unprincipled Charles, so did the royal eye rest more coldly upon him than it had been wont to do; nor was this his only cause of anxiety; for, devoted as he was to the fortunes of the Stuarts, there was yet a feeling nearer his heart than even his loyalty. Ere he left England to join the Prince, he had become the affianced husband of the Lady Barbara Inglis, the daughter and heiress of the wealthy Earl of Mornenbury, who had, with extreme reluctance, suffered his own pride and prudence to be overruled by the tears of his young and lovely child. This concession was made, however, when Peregrine was esteemed, if not as a noble, at least as an opulent, suitor; and when the luckless cavalier first opened his eyes to the appalling fact of his utter ruin, the miserable conviction came with it that he had by his own imprudence sacrificed all claim to that hand which it had cost him his best energies to win,

and of which he was but too conscious, that had it not been forfeited by his own folly, the whole world would have failed to deprive him. But Marden was a man of honour and a gentleman; he was the representative of a race whose name was free alike from taint and from reproach, and he was incapable of casting the first blot upon the escutcheon of his ancestors.

He withdrew for awhile from Woodstock, and bent his melancholy way to the lordly demense where the Earl was then entertaining a noble circle of friends. He was warmly received by the host, who had yet to learn the tale of his ruin; and tenderly and tearfully by the Lady Barbara, who loved him with a depth of affection which yielded not even to his own. It will readily be believed that the lovers failed not to seize the first opportunity which presented itself, to escape from the cold and courtly eyes which watched their every motion; and to shut out for awhile all memory of a

world which to them in their first heart-dream was a mere wilderness. To say that the Lady Barbara was beautiful, were but to rank her with a thousand of her sex; she was the loveliest woman who ever bore the name of Marden, diminutive as a fairy, symmetrical as a sylph, with eyes like amethysts, and hair like a sunbeam; as Peregrine looked upon her in her young loveliness, while she wreathed her small white fingers in his dark flowing curls, and called him her truant cavalier, who had sacrificed his mistress to his monarch, Marden writhed at the recollection that her playful reproaches were but too well founded. Yet how to tell her this! Twice he essayed the tale; and twice her hand was pressed upon his lips, as she bade him talk no more of the royal Stuart who had won him from her, but of himself who had at last returned to his allegiance. These delays were however dangerous to the purity of his purpose, and he at length resolved to risk the recital. The lips of the

lady quivered as she listened, and the bloom fled from her cheek. She raised not her eyes from the earth, but seemed to shun the gaze of her lover, as though, in meeting it, she should render his painful task yet more irksome. But when he had told her all, and that with respectful devotion he besought of her to suffer him to retain the miniature which her own hands had hung about his neck; in order that, while she was happy with another, he might at least soothe his breaking heart by that sweet though sad memorial of all that he had lost through a mistaken loyalty and a careless expenditure—then indeed she raised her mild and tearful eyes to his, and almost smiled at his request; but there was such an expression of utter misery on the brow of Marden that the smile faded away at once; and a gravity, such as he had never before seen on those fair features overspread her countenance, as she laid her hand in his, and with a solemnity which in so young a creature

was almost startling, uttered a vow that no breathing man save the lover of her youth should ever call her wife!

In vain did Peregrine remind her that he was ruined; that his very patrimony was deeply pledged; nothing could shake the constancy of his high-born, and high-hearted mistress. He had at least, she said, not given away his love; she acknowledged no controul over his meaner possessions: she had enough for both; to his Prince he had given his worldly wealth, but on her he had bestowed himself; nor would she coldly permit him to resume the gift. He had won her heart, and he was bound in honour as a true cavalier to wear it. Marden listened to her sweet voice as she playfully but firmly insisted on her claim to his constancy: he beheld her generous and self-sacrificing energy, and he blushed for his own weakness. At her feet he poured out his deep and almost painful gratitude, while she bent over him, and for the first time parted the dark locks from his brow, and

sealed their new compact there with her warm lips.

Still dark misgivings stole over the spirit of Marden that even now he was but compromising with his honour; for if Lord Mornenbury had yielded a reluctant consent to the wealthy heir of the Mardens, how much more improbable did it appear that he would bestow his only child upon the last scion of a ruined house! There was agony in the thought! But when he murmured it in the ear of his mistress, she only smiled in scorn at his suspicions, and bade him sport a brighter brow when he rejoined the circle of the Earl, lest the two noble suitors who were contending for her hand, and receiving her very frowns as favours, should believe that he had indeed resigned her to their importunities; and so rob her of her small remaining portion of courtesy and patience. Peregrine could not but obey: and, with renovated hope, he once more resumed his place beside his mistress.

But the Lady Barbara had not yet poured

forth the whole treasure of her devotion; she urged Marden again and again to describe to her the manner of the king, and to explain his reasons for believing that his change of fortune (a change which had been solely produced by his devotion to the royal cause,) had indeed induced Charles to withdraw from him the favour with which he had been hitherto regarded. In obedience to her request, as well as to prolong an interview so delightful to himself, Peregrine detailed every circumstance, and dwelt on every inference, until the indignant girl felt herself compelled to acquiesce in the justice of his suspicions; high-spirited as she was, she had been reluctant to mete out to Charles, (whose misfortunes had at least had the effect of softening and interesting every female heart in his cause,) so large a measure of scorn as she felt would be warranted by a meanness and ingratitude so unparalleled; but when she had heard the whole tale, the proud blood mantled her brow, and she turned the

light of her large eyes upon her lover with an expression of haughtiness in them which he had never before detected there.

"This must not be"—she said; "this shall not be—no idle or envious tongue must be permitted to cast a blight on the fair fame of Peregrine Marden: no lying rival must be allowed to insinuate that he was frowned from a Court where he had been held so long in favour. This shall be looked to: for the evil may be averted. Were you in prosperity, Peregrine, I should hold it to be unmaidenly and bold to voluntarily hasten our marriage: but you are in sorrow, and I have so long been your wife in heart, that I esteem it as my duty to relieve you from your anxiety. Need I expatiate on the truth of my affection, when I thus fearlessly confide in your worth? But I am aware that the world is ever most ready-witted in creating inferences of evil; and while I remain under my father's roof, I am fettered by the observances of that world. Once your wife, that which

would now seem levity will become hallowed even in the eyes of the most rigid—I shall be free to act.—"

But even conscious as she was of the purity and beauty of her own generous motives, the cheek of the Lady Barbara became crimson as she spoke. Who shall paint the delight, the affection, with which Marden looked upon the fair and fragile being who thus nobly offered herself as the redeemer of his fallen fortunes, and the guardian of his cherished fame? As he pressed her to his bosom, he could scarcely credit the extent of his happiness; and had it not been that a dark foreboding of the Earl's displeasure cast its cloud over his spirit, his swelling heart might have failed to contain its load of bliss.

The Lady Barbara had not even on this occasion, however, calculated too sanguinely on the extent of her father's indulgence. Lord Mornenbury had long been convinced that the heart of his daughter was irrevocably bestowed

upon Marden; and, greatly as he deplored the infatuation of the young cavalier, he yet honcured its motive; and was too unworldly in spirit to put the possession of wealth in competition with the happiness of his only child. At the earnest entreaty of the Lady Barbara, all mention of Marden's pecuniary embarrassments was studiously avoided; by her entreaty he outshone in the splendour of his attire, and the value of his horses and hawks, all the noble guests of the Earl. He discoursed freely and frequently of Charles and his court, by which means he silenced the whispers of the suspicious, and negatived the tidings of the envious and busy; and when he at length led the Lady Barbara to the altar, no one ventured to insinuate that his ruined fortunes were to be redeemed by the broad lands of the heiress. Great was, however, the astonishment even of the Earl when the bride announced her intention of immediately proceeding to Marden Hall, there to live in the strictest retirement until the

termination of her husband's duties at Woodstock should restore him to her, and to his home. Nor did Peregrine listen with less amazement to so extraordinary an announcement: in vain did he assure her, with all the earnestness of affection, that he held himself exonerated from further attendance on the king, who had, by his ingratitude and discourtesy, cancelled all ties between them; the bride was resolute.—

"Go, Marden;" she said, as she hung fondly upon his neck; "go, and teach these babblers that they knew not of what they talked—and this selfish and narrow-hearted Charles that his favour was too soon withdrawn—and when the name of Peregrine Marden has become once more the by-word of fashion and expense, then let the triflers see how lightly you hold such fame, and return to your home, and to her whose every study shall be how she may best make that home an equivalent for all that the world can offer beyond it."

The remonstrances of Marden, and the en-

treaties of his bride, may be imagined; but the Lady Barbara at length prevailed; and when, as a last resource, her reluctant husband reminded her of his utter inability to meet the demands which such a renewed course of expense must necessarily entail upon him, she drew from a casket the costly necklace and diadem of gems which she had worn at the celebration of her marriage, and placed them in his hand. Marden shrank as from the touch of an adder, but she was not to be thus discouraged.

"Listen to me," she said, "ere you negative my suit—I ask you not to dispose so irrevocably of these baubles that you may be disabled hereafter from redeeming them; but I know that there are means of raising a large sum upon them in trust. At the present moment I am unable by any other method to command the funds necessary for the furtherance of my plan; but this may be effected secretly and safely, and until you return to me I

can have no wish to array myself in diamonds."

Wild, romantic, and almost reprehensible, appeared this scheme to Marden, but it was evident that his bride had so calculated on his compliance that he wavered in his resolve. A few days, however, removed his scruples, for ere the lapse of a week the Lady Barbara placed a considerable sum of money in his hands, which, through the agency of a confidential attendant, she had procured by the deposit of her jewels; and with an effort painful almost beyond credence, Marden shortly afterwards bade adieu to his fair young wife, and turned his horse's head towards Woodstock.

Many a gibe and jest circulated among the courtiers on the re-appearance of the recreant cavalier; and even Charles himself hesitated not to hint very intelligibly that the bride had been to the full as welcome at Woodstock as the bridegroom. Marden, however, heeded not the poor wit of the anti-room, nor the

polished impertinence of the presence-chamber; but with an unruffled brow suffered the delighted monarch to win his money at piquet and ombre, and the no less gratified courtiers to ride his horses and to fly his hawks. His heart, notwithstanding the increasing favour of Charles, and the lacquey-like adulation of his followers, was however still with his young wife; and, having in compliance with her entreaty, fooled away a few weeks among associates whom he despised, and near a king to whose follies and vices he could no longer continue insensible, he suddenly announced his intention of withdrawing altogether from the Court, and spending the remainder of his time at his ancestral home.

A volley of laughter responded to his intelligence:—

"Our uxorious cavalier pines for his young wife;" said the dissolute Prince; "he finds our society a poor equivalent for her gentle blandishments!—How say you, gentlemen? Shall we

to the saddle, and wend with him to Marden, in order that we may form our own judgment of his taste?"

"You would but waste your time, Sire;" said Sir Everard Moreland sarcastically: "for the Lady is to be veiled and grated until the return of her liege lord, and would forswear such dangerous company; and in good truth both the cavalier and the lady may be right in so doing, for I know not which were the most dangerous, whether to domesticate a hawk in a dove-cote, or to introduce the last of the Stuarts into a lady's bower."

"How now, sir!" exclaimed Charles, turning sharply and angrily towards his young adherent: "you are somewhat loose of tongue, and might in courtesy have spared us the comparison—" Then smoothing his ruffled brow, and wreathing his lips into the smile which he could so readily assume, he turned to Marden and said blandly: "You must forgive us that we have started so poor a discourse upon so

fair a theme, but you know that we do not assume to be anchorites at Woodstock."

The cavalier only bent his head: the shade which had gathered upon his brow was not dispelled by the partial apology of the Prince; and his breast yet swelled with suppressed indignation.

"Beshrew me, nevertheless, good friend;" resumed Charles after a momentary pause; "but you are fonder of wedlock than we are, or you had not wilfully run your neck into the noose; and doubtless you hold your bright lady-wife as a phœnix among women; while we, on our part, would fearlessly wager our jewelled star (the last bauble we possess, by the way!) that she is neither more lovely nor more cruel at heart, than our own pretty Nell."

The reply of Marden was drowned in the more vociferous rejoinder of the young Knight of Moreland, who, eager to redeem himself with Charles, hastily exclaimed; "Sire, suffer me with all respect to hold you to your pledge,

while on my part, I will bring forward a jewel which shall repay the loss of your own royal decoration twenty-fold, as an Israelite would estimate them.—My father, whose nature smacks somewhat of that same money-loving, and money-keeping quality, but a short while since lent a heavy sum upon the one of which I speak, to a noble lady, whose secret, and doubtless also, sacred necessities, compelled her to place it for a time in his keeping. Pretty simpleton! she trusted him to as great an extent as even he could wish; but when I urged him to tell me her name, he talked of his honour, and refused to reveal it to his most hopeful son. This jewel, sir, can never be redeemed, for I learnt thus much at least; that the proceeds are to be principally applied to relieve the necessities of a spendthrift; and your majesty will readily admit that there is little chance of such an indulgence weakening the springald's taste for luxury. Nay, so assured is the old man that he has in point of

fact purchased the trinket at a most satisfactory price, that he has already promised it as a bridal gift to any fair dame who may be induced to undertake the task of taming his only son and heir. Thus, as you will perceive, Sir, the pretty plaything is even now my actual property, and in so good a cause will I freely peril it."

"Now out upon you, for a scatter-brains!" laughed Charles; who was nevertheless resolved not to lose so good a chance of possessing himself of a fair prize, should the young prodigal be able to produce the jewel: "we must have occular proof of the value of the gewgaw ere we risk our own regal star. Therefore look to it, young Sir."

The giddy boy desired no better; and the wily monarch, turning to Marden, said in a low voice, "Saw you ever how the scatterling receives our jests as gospel! and bandies with the good name of his neighbour's wife, as though he were playing foot-ball! Think no more of this, Marden; these hot spirits will be cooled

in time, and meanwhile they are scarce worthy of the words which we waste upon them."

"I am glad that you did but jest, Sire:" said the young husband coldly; "for it is scarce seemly for any man who wears a sword to stand by and hear his own wife flouted before his face; while, as a devoted follower of your family, I was conscious that it had been to the full as unbecoming in me to have resented in the royal presence a discourse which had originated with my monarch."

"Tush, man! do not turn quarrel-seeker:" said Charles, impatiently; "we had brawling enough in France to satisfy any reasonable cavalier; and, by St. Denis! we may have something to do to hold our own yet, without cutting one another's throats for a light word or two."

So saying he turned upon his heel, humming an air from a popular vaudeville, and smoothing into more graceful order the tall plume of his velvet hat. Marden looked after him as he moved away; and a bitter pang

smote on his heart, as he remembered that to gratify the selfish excess of this vain and thankless being, he had squandered an ample fortune, and become a pensioner on the devotion and generosity of his young wife. But the deed was done, and once more he vowed to himself that the close of the coming week should see him depart for ever from the court.

Sir Everhard Moreland meanwhile sped to London on his unholy errand; and little guessed Marden, as he sought in every direction for the giddy coxcomb who had ventured to speak lightly of his wife, that he was in fact even now following up the ribbald jest which had so offended him in the chamber of the King. In as short a period as it was possible for him to make the journey, the young knight re-appeared; and, having exchanged his travelling dress of buff-leather for a more courtly suit, he entered the dining-hall just as the merry monarch and his satellites were drowning whatever portion of intellect they separately pos-

sessed, over the flagon and the wine-cup. A shout of welcome greeted the flushed and excited Sir Everhard, and he drained a deep draught by the command of Charles ere he was suffered to tell his tidings. Marden, though he suppressed the feeling, felt his breast heave, as the profligate youth was summoned to a vacant seat not ten paces from the King: and awaited with a vague but breathless anxiety the communication at whose import he could not even guess.

"And what news of London?" asked Charles lightly: "does the famous bridge yet span the river—Jews lend money at usury—and merry maidens turn a kind eye upon a cap and feather! Or are we to have a new edition of roundheads, and to do homage to a shorn chin, and a short cloak?"

"In sooth, Sire, I neither asked nor cared:" was the reply; "mine was a brighter errand; and if you would learn how I have sped, look here—" and pressing his finger upon the spring

of an inlaid casket, as the lid flew back, the young knight exposed to the gaze of the company the diamond necklace of the Lady Barbara!

A murmur of admiration ran round the table as Marden started to his feet: "Forbear, Sir;" he exclaimed with difficulty, for the violence of his emotion almost robbed him of the power of utterance: "forbear to pursue your hateful jest yet further; I claim that jewel in the name of the daughter of the Earl of Mornenbury—of my own wedded wife—forbear, as you are a true man and a cavalier!"

"Why how now, Peregrine Marden," said Charles coldly: "what means this burst of passion? surely Sir;" he continued, as he held still more carefully the jewel which was already in his grasp; "the mould in which the necklace of the fair lady of Marden was cast, may not have necessarily been destroyed because she had so far honoured it with her approval as to have fashioned her taste to its device; there

may have been more than one bauble so arranged, and it may be that this identical trinket has never enjoyed the enviable privilege of resting on the fair throat of Lady Barbara Mornenbury.

"If it be indeed that of my wife, Sire," said the excited husband; "press but your finger upon the clasp, and it will fall back and reveal our united cypher."

The King, partly from sport and partly from curiosity, yielded to the suggestion; and the secret spring instantly obeyed his touch. "Subject for a romance, by St. Denis!" said Charles, with a light laugh; "truly your lady-spouse must hold your love at a high price, when she buys it by so vast a sacrifice—we would scarcely have redeemed our own mother at such a cost, had we been a fair dame. You must pardon us after such a temptation, master of Marden, if we are prompted to pursue our sport something further;—in very truth, we must look upon this bright wonder, for we are now ready

to admit that she must be a phœnix, though we were sceptical a while back; nay, never frown—if we do her no more than justice, (and a day or two ago you reproached us to our beard when we ventured a doubt of her perfectibility,) you can incur no risk, and we shall enjoy a right pleasant recreation."

In vain did Marden expostulate; wine and vanity had united to convince the dissolute Charles that he was all-powerful and all-sufficient; and when, at length, he became weary of the fearless upbraidings of the high-spirited husband, he sternly ordered the master-at-arms to take possession of the sword of the disaffected cavalier, and to hold him a strict prisoner in his apartment till such time as the royal order should be issued for his release.

Bitter indeed were the feelings of Marden as he saw himself compelled to yield obedience to so iniquitous a mandate; nor was his suffering lessened by the light and mocking laughter with which the King and his companions left the Hall,

at the moment when the officer, summoned by Charles, approached to take charge of his prisoner. How he cursed at that galling moment the blind folly which had wrecked him: how, with the most stedfast reliance on the virtue and high spirit of his wife, did he deprecate the restraint which forbade him to support her in the coming trial. Nor could the cavalier altogether divest himself of the memory that it was a King who was about to be received beneath his roof: that Barbara, bred in comparative seclusion, could not but feel her heart flutter at the presence of so distinguished an inmate. But these thoughts, though they sufficed to render his captivity tenfold more insupportable, availed him nothing; and he was compelled to await, with what fortitude he might, the issue of the adventure. Conscience in its turn was not idle: for, as Marden sat in his solitary room, he recalled a score of adventures in which he had borne the volatile Charles company, to the full as discredit-

able and as unprincipled as this which now threatened his own domestic peace; but never heretofore had he seen the crime in all its natural heinousness. Now his pulse quickened, and his blood boiled as he looked back upon the past; while every memory but maddened him the more.

Charles meanwhile had given the word "to horse," and had gaily turned his bridle-rein towards Marden; while many a disappointed eye followed him as he went, attended only by Sir Everhard Moreland; for when the idle courtiers entered so warmly into the scheme they had pleased themselves with the anticipation that they should each and all be presented to the lovely daughter of Lord Mornenbury.

A sharp spur and a swift steed soon wears through space; and the setting sun had just imparted its last glow to the clouds which pillowed it, when the King and his attendant knight reined up their horses at the gate of the Ivy Lodge.

Boundless was the astonishment of the Lady of Marden when the great bell of the Hall rang out, and the gray-headed steward announced two noble cavaliers from the court, unaccompanied by her husband. For a moment the Lady hesitated where she should receive them; in the next, alarm had superseded ceremony, and she flew forward, with enquiry faultering on her tongue.

It has been said that the Lady Barbara was beautiful; and of this fact the profligate prince had been careful to assure himself ere he undertook the present journey; but it is nevertheless certain that for loveliness so ethereal and so girlish as that which he now beheld he was totally unprepared. The artless arrangement of her bright auburn hair; the delicate symmetry of her fairy-like figure, the exquisite whiteness of her finely rounded arms, from which the wide sleeves prevalent at the period fell back so heavily, the perfect formation of her head and throat, but above all the

bright and beaming expression of her perfectly chiselled features, at once rivetted the eye, even if they failed to touch the heart, of the young monarch. He answered her anxious enquiries for her husband by well worded evasions; flattered her warm affection by eulogiums on his person and prowess, and finally bespoke her hospitality until the morrow.

The Lady courteously acceded to his request; and, having carefully ascertained that all things were well ordered for their entertainment, she dispatched the aged steward to the Hall to pray their excuses for her non-attendance, after which ceremony she retired to her private chamber for the night. Thus far her prudence had baffled the unworthy designs of Charles, but he quickly consoled himself by remarking to his companion that the cause which failed to-day might prosper to-morrow, and that in any case the quarry was well worthy of the swoop.

The morrow came, and with it re-appeared the Lady Barbara; as gentle, as beautiful, and

as courteous as ever. Still no syllable reached her of the intended departure of the cavaliers for Woodstock, though the grooms had been in waiting throughout the morning, ready to rein up the horses of the strangers, and to obey their parting behests. Yet no suspicion clouded the pure mind of the mistress of Marden, and an hour before the evening meal she summoned her favorite maiden, and throwing her veil over her head, bent her steps towards the Rosery. This was her favorite haunt; she had herself reclaimed it from the open Park, and superintended most of its improvements: with her own fair hand she had planted many of the trees by which the spot is now so closely screened; and she had pleased herself with the belief that, on his return, her husband would love it for her sake.

They had not long been busied among the flowers when they were joined by the two courtly strangers, who assiduously proffered their aid; but with that intuitive delicacy which

never fails a modest and right-minded woman, the Lady Barbara at once desisted from her employment, and, with a somewhat stately courtesy, gathered the folds of her veil about her, and prepared to return to the house. From this purpose she was however diverted by the ready address of the taller cavalier, who discoursed with so lively an enthusiasm of the buds and blossoms by which they were surrounded, that his listener became involuntarily interested; and it was not until after some moments that she discovered how much she had gained on her attendant and the younger stranger.

"We will return to the Rosery, Sir Knight, if it so pleasure you;" she said gravely: "for I perceive that Helen has lingered strangely, and the lime-avenue leads immediately to the spot where we shall consequently rejoin our company. I should crave the pardon of your friend that I have suffered my interest in your discourse to betray me into an act of discourtesy."

"Talk not of excuses, Madam;" said Charles, unable longer to withhold the expression of his admiration, and moreover conscious that his well-tutored attendant would suffer no intrusion on his privacy: "it is for me to crave a pardon which, should you fail to grant it, will degrade existence into a mere living death. I have long panted for this moment: prostrate as I am beneath the spell of your fascination, I should hold it as a crime did I not impart to you the tidings which I came hither to disclose. Look not towards me with that glance of timid terror; the Lady of Marden will never need protection while one English heart yet beats high for beauty."

"The Lady of Marden, sir;" retorted his indignant companion: "can need no protection while her high-minded husband is spared to her."

Charles looked for a moment almost in reverence upon the proud brow of the lady, but his passion soon o'ermastered his respect.

"You say truly, Madam;" he replied in an accent of affected reluctance: "you say truly, had the master of Marden yet been true to his allegiance, his fair young bride had required no other safeguard than his arms; pity is it that so strong a trust should ever be requited with falsehood."

"What mean you, sir?" asked the Lady Barbara scornfully: "do you think so lightly of the prudence of Peregrine Marden as to believe that he bestowed himself upon a weak girl, whose faith may be shaken by every breath of wind? know me better, sir, be you whom you may; I am not to be thus cheated."

"Madam, you do but delude yourself:" persisted the King, whose pursuit became only the more eager from opposition; "his very absence is proof against him: had any man with warm blood in his pulses left so fair and so young a bride for the wine-cup and the dice-box? ahome of love and happiness for the loud vices of a dissolute court?"

"My husband sped to Woodstock at my own entreaty," said the lady calmly; "and ere long he will return, when he may perchance not thank a stranger for thus gratuitously intermeddling in the affairs of his household."

"I pray you be not indignant, madam;" murmured the King deprecatingly; "it is but for your own sweet sake that I thus risk your displeasure; and, even now, quailing as I do beneath your frown, even now will I persist—you deceive yourself, madam, or rather you are deceived by the artifices of a false traitor. I pray you turn not away, but listen to me; stranger as I may be to your eye, I am not such to your history; and methinks when the Lady Barbara Mornenbury lavished her most costly ornaments on a chosen suitor, he might have bestowed them in his turn more worthily than on a wanton."

"How, sir? what mean you?" exclaimed his companion, her large eyes flashing, and her lip quivering with emotion: "if you would not

madden me by suspense, explain yourself at once."

"By word and deed both, madam, since such is your good pleasure;" said Charles with affected humility, as he drew from the bosom of his vest, an inlaid casket, and, pressing upon the spring, exposed to the astonished gaze of the young bride her own costly jewel. "Do I err in asserting that this noble ornament once belonged to the Lady Barbara Mornenbury? am I in error when I state that, to supply the necessities of a spendthrift husband, she generously pledged the jewel with an usurer to raise a sum of money? And shall I not also be credited when I explain that, while in her fond faith she believed that she had enabled him to resume his forfeited position at the Court of his Prince, he was busied in redeeming the jewel, that he might hang it upon the neck of one of Charles's favourites?"

The Lady Barbara did not immediately reply: the arrow was in her heart: the proof

of Marden's falsehood was so manifest — the tidings of the stranger were so consistent—the tale was so feasible.—She took a turn or two on the wide path, as if irresolute, or unable to frame an answer. The King meanwhile stood earnestly gazing upon her, with the open casket in his hand. At length she stopped opposite to him, and, raising her eyes steadily to his, she said gravely:—

"This is a heavy tale, sir, and one which involves the happiness of my whole life—I cannot afford to hazard it upon the cast of a die. I have known Peregrine Marden long, very long: every action of his which is recorded in my memory (and they are not few!) is high and honourable—no man becomes a villain in an hour. Yours, sir, may be a name as pure from stain and reproach as Marden's, but you are a stranger — I know not even whether you are of gentle blood—"

"I am from Charles's Court, madam," was the hasty rejoinder.

"Alas! that is no patent of nobility;" replied the lady; "there are many at the Court of Charles who would do dishonour to a yeoman's cottage — many too who spurning its vices and its mis-rule, cling only to his misfortunes—if you be truly one of these, sir, for that at least I can honour you."

"No one, madam, mourns his misfortunes more deeply."

"It is a holy grief;" was the reply: "but we wander from our subject. Ere I grant my faith to so dark a tale, I must at least know from whose lips I learn it."

"I am bound to obey you in all things;" said the King, as he bent his knee, and took the hand of the lady; "rightly believing that no meaner messenger would avail on such an errand, I would not risk a failure; and thus, lady, you see before you Charles Stuart, who here vows allegiance to your beauty, obedience to your behests, and revenge upon your betrayer."

He might have continued to harangue thus for ever, for the lady stood bending over him in silence, lost in her own thoughts; her hand in his, and her lips forcibly compressed. But Charles was unable to appreciate the beauty of her nature, and he soon awakened her from her reverie.

"I may have wandered hitherto, lady, for I had never looked on you, but now my ardent spirit has found a resting-place; secure in your love I shall never stray again: warmed by your smiles, I shall defy from henceforth the chilly disappointments of a cheating world; secure of your affection, I shall cast from me the million anxieties which have hitherto beset my path."

"You have done well, sir," said the Lady Barbara composedly, "to recal my scattered senses, for in truth they had wandered strangely; but you will forgive me if I venture to doubt that you are indeed Charles Stuart. I have been taught, from my earliest years, to put up a prayer for the holy cause of which you

have just declared yourself to be the representative; and, although I was told that many needy adventurers had flocked to the Stuart banner, who had, by their vices and their follies, degraded the fortunes of the royal exile, I have never ceased to picture to my fancy the Prince himself as a model of chivalry and high feeling; how then can I reconcile this discrepancy? Charles Stuart, as I have imagined him, would never have lent himself to the poor office of sowing discord between one of his most devoted adherents, and the wife of his love—thus, sir, do I condemn you out of your own mouth; and, having been led by reason to negative the assertion of your identity, I hold myself equally free to doubt the purport of your tidings; and I must have more full and faithful authority, ere I suffer myself to wrong my lord and husband even by a suspicion!"

Charles had not yet risen from his knee; and, as he gazed on the girlish figure before him, he could scarcely give credence to his own

senses;—was it indeed possible that He, the descendant of Kings, could quail beneath the eyes of a mere maiden, and be foiled by the inartificial words of a courtier's wife? Surely she did but dally with his passion, and seek to urge him on to more profuse engagements.

In the wildness of his new and sudden prepossession, he poured forth promises, which, even as he uttered them, he was conscious that it was but too probable he should never be enabled to perform; and breathed vows which had become utterly worthless by their frequent profanation; had he glanced at the pale cheek and curved lip of his auditor, his words had been less ready of utterance, but, carried away alike by his passion, and by the knowledge of the price which many of those whom he had wooed had attached to his exalted station, he looked not to the eloquent countenance of the Lady Barbara, to learn the success of his suit; and consequently it was not until he ceased to speak, that the soft voice of the young bride convinced him of his error.

"And are you really," she asked, "the veritable Charles Stuart? Are you the son of the martyred monarch, whose blood yet cries aloud for vengeance on his murderers? Are you the heir of retribution? Forgive me, sir, that I have doubted your identity—and suffer me to part from you with the respect which is due to my rightful sovereign. My father, sir, perilled his life in the cause of your family; my husband has ruined his fortunes to uphold your claim—I have myself sacrificed my very jewels in support of your regal state—do not rob me of that still brighter ornament, my fair fame—of that far more valuable possession, my husband's love—do not turn against me the very engines which I have employed in your service—I read in your eye, sir, that you relent—go, and forget that you have ever requited the devotion of an adherent, by a thought of dishonouring his wife, or cast back upon a faithful follower the misery of which he has laboured to lighten your own path."

As the Lady Barbara spoke, she bent with assumed humility to the yet kneeling monarch, and then turned haughtily away.

"Now, by St. Denis of France!" muttered Charles, as he slowly regained his feet, and looked after the retiring lady. "I must never boast again of my prowess, for I have been fairly foiled by a girl. Looked mortal eyes ever upon so very a child as yon, with such a feeling as mine? and yet I cannot pursue the prize, for she has a soul which might fill the breast of an Alexander. Plague seize the chit! Why did I trouble myself with Marden's love passages, and thus tempt my fate. Even the fool Moreland has doubtless had better fortune, for the maid seemed at least less cruel than the mistress." And having thus concluded his soliloquy, Charles gave utterance to a low and peculiar whistle which terminated a much more tender *tête-à-tête* than that in which he had himself been so recently engaged.

At the earliest dawn the two stranger nobles

were in the saddle, and nothing remained to remind the mistress of Marden of their visit, save the memory of her favorite attendant, who had mysteriously disappeared a few hours after the gallants of the court.

Within a week the truant husband returned, and peace and love established their dwelling beneath the roof-tree of Marden Hall.

"Will you not now confess," asked Mary playfully, as at the termination of the legend she turned with a smile towards Howard. "Will you not now confess that we have a right to love the Rosery?"

"You have indeed; and this then is the history of the fair woman whose portrait hangs in the north gallery, and who is represented in the act of closing a jewel-casket."

"You have guessed rightly, and that same diamond necklace, of which such frequent mention has been made, is now in my possession. Sir Everhard Moreland was a false prophet,

for the Earl of Mornenbury no sooner learnt the tale which I have just told you, than he forthwith reclaimed the jewel, which, amid all the reverses of our family has never since been suffered to pass from the direct line; and it is recorded that no less than nine brides of the house of Marden have already worn it at the altar."

Howard sighed as he listened; but assuredly he thought not of the diamond necklace.

"And now the thickening twilight warns me that I must defer my visit to the Ivy Lodge until to-morrow:" resumed Mary, struck with the silence of her companion; "my father will wonder at my non-appearance, and I am bound also to apologize to yourself for having thus intruded on your time with an old-world legend."

Earnestly, fervently, did Howard thank the fair girl for the indulgence which she had shewn to his curiosity; and they walked slowly onward among the flowers, while the nightin-

gales were pouring forth their low song from the boughs of the tall trees, until they reached a by-path which led immediately across the park to the hamlet. Here they parted, and the sweet "good night" of Mary was echoed in a tone tremulous with emotion by her companion.

"How sad he is!" murmured Mary to herself, as she pursued her solitary way, and an unconscious sigh escaped her: "he has lately appeared like one bowed down by some secret grief—perhaps, if he were to confide in us, we might be able, at least, to offer him some consolation; my father has so sincere a regard for him." Here the gentle girl paused for a moment in her reverie, and then quickening her pace, she almost articulated, "I think Mr. Daubigny *must* have left Marden by this time." The idea appeared to give her pleasure, for a smile rose to her lip as she entered the house, and cast aside her shawl to rejoin her father.

CHAPTER III.

"I TRUST that I may be suffered to resume the subject of our last discourse," said Mr. Daubigny, as he drew his chair closer to that of his host, in the old oak library; "it is one so near my heart that it requires a considerable effort on my part to dilate on any other. If Miss Marden decidedly decline my suit, I shall immediately leave England; the idea of dwelling constantly near her, and incurring the risk of occasional contact, is one with which I cannot venture to contend."

"Be not so impetuous, my young friend," returned Mr. Marden soothingly; "although, as I have already informed you, it is very palpable that Mary evades all mention of your suit, she has, nevertheless, not positively negatived your hopes. You have my full and willing permission to urge it yourself, since I have proved so poor an advocate, and I do not scruple to acknowledge that you have my best wishes for your success. I am by no means insensible to the disinterestedness of your affection; for, conscious as you are of the small portion which my daughter will ever inherit, and the fact that this estate goes from her to a distant male relation; it is a great happiness to me to reflect that, from feeling alone, you can have sought the love of Mary Marden. Nor is she herself, I am well convinced, ungrateful for the preference; my gentle child is too amiable and too pure of heart, not to appreciate as they deserve the worthy impulses of our nature wherever they appear; how much

more then must she value them when they are brought home to her own heart!"

"Were they indeed brought home to her own heart, I should be satisfied;" said Daubigny "but I am only too conscious that Miss Marden's is to me, as yet, a sealed volume. And I may be pardoned if I permit myself at times to wonder how it can be thus:—I am so completely the creature of her will that my whole fortune shall be at her disposal—I will make no reservation—her pleasure shall be my duty; and her gratification the one study of my life—it is hard that she should remain unmoved by so utter a devotion—"

"Rather call it singular, Reginald;" said the old man: "but I am convinced that this coldness cannot last—the very affection which Mary entertains for your mother and sister is favourable to your suit."

"Spare my pride, I pray you, Sir;" exclaimed the young man with a sudden burst of irrepressible passion: "I do not wish Miss

Marden to marry my family—I seek to be loved for myself—to be master of the affections of my own wife; and I could almost quarrel with the very animal on which she may bestow a caress, which is mine by right."

Mr. Marden looked up in wonder: Daubigny had started from his seat, and was pacing the floor with rapid strides; his eyes flashed fire; and there was a fierceness about his compressed lips and lowering brow, which startled and pained his companion. The very character of Daubigny's countenance was calculated to render these sudden exhibitions of passion still more fearful; for, on ordinary occasions, there was an immobility about his features which effectually concealed all trace of the fiery spirit that burnt beneath. This was the first occasion on which he had suffered his prudence to be overmastered by his passions in the presence of Mr. Marden; his love for Mary, like every other feeling of his nature, was beyond controul; and although he had

never failed to urge his suit with the old gentleman on every opportunity, he had nevertheless hitherto confined his arguments within proper bounds, and struggled successfully with the impetuosity of his natural character.

The astonishment of his companion was proportionably great, therefore, at this unexpected, and as it appeared to him, uncalled-for burst of passion; and he sat for a moment silently endeavouring to account to his own reason for its indulgence.

During the pause which ensued, Daubigny perceived his error, and hastened to retrieve it:

"You must pardon this intemperate folly:" he said with a ready smile, as he extended his hand to the old man: "You see, Sir, what a boy my love has made me!"

"I both pardon and deplore it, my dear young friend;" replied Mr. Marden, instantly conciliated by his altered manner; "and at the same time I would entreat of you to controul yourself more effectually; you would

scare my gentle girl by such an exhibition of violence, while you must shake your own nerves most fearfully: when you are a few years older, you will look back in wonder upon such needless impetuosity."

"It is, however, by no means my characteristic;" said Daubigny. "I have been called cold, calculating, and cautious: taunted with my placidity of mien and manner; and held forth as the embodyment of a human icicle: I am seldom, very seldom, *so* moved; nor do I believe that any feeling less powerful than my love for Miss Marden could thus have shook me."

To a father, such an apology as this could not fail to be all-sufficient: and Daubigny, as he glanced towards the old gentleman, felt that it was so. In fact, the open, straight-forward, honest nature of Mr. Marden was no match for the sinuosity of spirit so predominant in his companion: for, never suspecting others of a worthlessness of which he felt himself to be incapable, he was too prone to look only on

the surface of things, and to attribute an estimable motive even to the most faulty actions.

It was a maxim of Rochefaucauld that all men came into the world either to cheat or to be cheated; and, adopting these premises, the good old gentleman was decidedly a moral dupe. But not so his companion. An unobservant spectator would have pronounced Reginald Daubigny to be a strikingly handsome man; he had not a defective feature: his smile was singularly attractive; and his voice was finely modulated, and skilfully managed; but, to the few who looked more closely, there was an occasional expression flitting over his countenance which negatived all its beauty; an almost imperceptible clouding of the brow, and compression of the lips, and a stealthy cunning in the subtle, snake-like eye, which betrayed the existence of less exalted attributes than those to which, at the first glance, his countenance would have appeared the index. In person he was tall and powerfully built, but

withal graceful and well-proportioned, and there was a softness and suavity in his ordinary manner which deluded the crowd into a belief that it was the natural result of an amiable and well-regulated mind.

How many a counterfeit passes current in the world through the same means; and how often is the genuine ore rejected, because the friction of society has failed to impart its polish!

As yet Daubigny had met with no temptation to evil: he was young, influential, heir to a considerable estate, the idol of his widowed mother, and the master-spirit of his immediate circle; but a careful observer would have been tempted to decide that the germ of evil was there — that the seed was sown — the twig planted—and that there existed no indwelling disposition to un-earth the one, or to uproot the other.

"I will at least learn my fate from Miss Marden's own lips;" resumed Daubigny after

a pause; "and if I should be happy enough to convince myself that her heart is yet to be won, I will not be lightly discouraged—I have been tempted at times to doubt whether it be so."

"And on whom, most suspicious Sir, do you imagine that she has bestowed it?" asked the old gentleman gaily; "she, whose existence is too monotonous to enable her to form even the usual friendships of society: no, no, my caged bird has never spread her wings; her every hope and affection centres at Marden."

"Of that I have no doubt," replied Daubigny, as a strange paleness flitted over his cheek, and the sinister expression to which we have already alluded lurked in his eye; "but Marden, my good Sir, is not a wilderness, and comparative solitude breeds strange fancies at times—I own I have had my own misgivings."

"Why, you self-tormenting sceptic!" smiled Mr. Marden; "are you jealous of the very birds of the air?"

"By no means, Sir; *they* cannot preach sentiment:" replied Daubigny, with marked emphasis; "my feeling is less irrational."

Mr. Marden started, and looked earnestly towards his companion, as though he would have elicited a more explicit communication; but the eyes of the young man were studiously averted; and he found himself compelled, however reluctantly, to pursue the subject.

"What wild fancy is this?" he asked, but not with his usual composure of tone and manner: "the thing is utterly impossible! Henry Howard, however estimable as a man, however exemplary as a minister, could never so far lose sight of common prudence and good sense as to love my daughter—and still less could Mary, conscious as she is how little she herself possesses, bestow her heart upon the curate of a country village, without friends, and without the very means of existence."

"And yet, if the fancy be so wild, is it not somewhat strange that your own thoughts

should fasten upon Mr. Howard, when I did not permit myself to mention his name?" asked Daubigny in reply.

"Strange enough, indeed!" acquiesced the old gentleman thoughtfully: "but no—no—" he added after a pause: "he is not so romantic, poor fellow; his thoughts are always running on his parishioners; and, now you force it upon my recollection, I have frequently remarked to myself of late, that he does not appear to enjoy the society of Mary as he once did: he is less frequently with us, and has become silent, and thoughtful, as though his mind were elsewhere."

"Indeed," said Daubigny coldly.

"And, in truth," pursued Mr. Marden, quite self-convinced by his own arguments; "instead of becoming less ceremonious as our friendship is of longer standing, he appears to me to grow more distant every day; particularly to Mary."

"And does it also appear to you that pro-

longed intimacy has had the same effect upon Miss Marden, Sir?" enquired Daubigny, with one of his most snake-like looks.

"Egad! I'm not quite sure but it has, now that you mention it," said the old gentleman: "yes, certainly Mary *is* less cordial to him than she was a month or two ago: therefore you see that you have nothing to fear in that quarter."

Daubigny smiled; but he suppressed the reply which might have interpreted that smile far otherwise than did the guileless and unsuspicious father; and after a momentary pause, he said calmly, "Be all this as it may, I will at least terminate my present suspense; one thing, however, I would ask of your justice: that should Miss Marden reject my proposals, you will so far oblige me as to take the only step by which my present suspicions can be removed; that of simply and frankly demanding of Mr. Howard whether he has ever loved your daughter."

"The question seems to me to be a strange one;" said Mr. Marden; "but I am so thoroughly satisfied that he has never indulged in such an idea that I can see no objection to putting it; therefore I make you the promise readily—I will speak to Mary also on the subject, and if——"

"By no means, Sir;" interposed Daubigny hastily; "I have too great a respect for the delicacy of Miss Marden to subject her to such a test; nor may it be necessary even to speak to Mr. Howard on the subject—I may yet be a successful suitor; and, in that case, my suspicion need not be promulgated. I have merely glanced at probabilities; the young curate has been much in the society of your fair daughter, and I am sceptical of the indifference of any man possessed of his opportunities: of the lady's feelings it were unbecoming in me to venture an opinion."

There was a haughty, and almost supercilious intonation in the voice of Daubigny as

he uttered these remarks, which grated unpleasantly on the ear of his auditor, but when he looked upon the smile which accompanied them, the old gentleman felt as though he had wronged the speaker, and merely nodded his reply.

"Am I not to have the happiness of seeing Miss Marden this evening?" asked Daubigny after a pause: "I had understood that she was walking in the grounds with you, on my arrival."

"You were rightly informed, but she complained of a severe head-ache, and I advised her to try rest. She is now in her room."

"I trust that the intelligence of my presence did not scare her?"

"No, no;" laughed the old man, "the ladies have better taste, and Mary is no exception to the rest of her sex."

As the words passed his lips, the door opened, and Miss Marden with her bonnet in her hand crossed the threshold. Even the slow eye of

her father detected the start of surprize, and the slight recoil, with which she noticed the presence of Daubigny; but she recovered herself instantly, and, as she extended her hand, uttered a hasty enquiry for Mrs. Daubigny and Honoria.

"They are well, quite well;" said the lover, as he bowed upon the offered hand; "and I was charged with, I know not how many, kind messages and remembrances from each; my mother complains sadly of the paucity of Miss Marden's visits, and my sister of the stupidity of The Elms, doubtlessly attributable to the same cause. My own murmurs I, of course, do not presume to utter."

Mary smiled faintly, and moved nearer to her father; who playfully catching at one of the long ribbons of her bonnet, enquired what that appendage meant.

"Simply that I have just indulged in a most delicious stroll;" she replied, with a slight tremor in her voice; "and have succeeded in leaving the head-ache of which I complained,

in the Rosery; I never remember a more lovely evening."

"And have you ventured to remain thus long alone, at such a distance from the house?" enquired Daubigny carelessly.

"No," smiled Mary; "I am not yet so thoroughly a heroine; I encountered Mr. Howard in my ramble, and he returned with me to the village path: he was in haste, and had chosen the Park as his shortest road."

Daubigny gave out a dry, quick cough, which did not even escape the ear of Mr. Marden.

A silence followed which was so oppressive, that, to dissipate it, Mary rang for lights.

"By the bye;" said the old gentleman, as though he had been struck by a sudden thought: "Anderson wished to make some communication to me relative to Beech Farm, and as there is no time like the present, I may as well go and hear what he has to say." And, ere his daughter could frame a plausible pretext for detaining him, he rose and left the room.

Mary and Daubigny were alone: the lamps which the servant had placed on the table did but partially light up the vast and sombre-looking apartment in which they stood; while the deep stillness that succeeded the retiring footsteps of Mr. Marden fell with oppressive weight on the spirit of the young lady. She felt as though this were the crisis of her fate, and she almost trembled as Daubigny approached her.

"At length, Miss Marden," he said in his most silvery tone; "the moment for which I have long panted has arrived; I am at last enabled, unfettered by the idle glance of cold curiosity, to plead my own cause. I am aware that the difficulty which I have hitherto experienced in doing this, has arisen from your repugnance to listen to me — a repugnance by which I have been equally surprised and pained: how I have merited the coldness with which you have so long looked upon me, it is not for me to determine; but if the most ardent affection,

the most sincere devotion, and the most uncompromising love, may enable me to win from you a warmer feeling, I at least deserve it; my happiness is in your hands; hesitate, I implore you, ere you finally destroy it. I talk not to you of my wealth, for, while I feel that I would myself resign all which I possess to win your love—while I am conscious that were you at this moment an outcast from fortune and from hope, I would for your sake resign all your sex, I cannot think so meanly of your more perfect nature as to imagine that the poor and paltry consideration of gold could ever influence your decisions—I would rather implore of you to remember how long and how devotedly I have dedicated myself to your service; how earnestly I have striven to render myself worthy of your favour; and how deeply the blight of your displeasure will wither all my future fortunes."

The heart of Mary sank as she listened: a chill like that of the grave crept over her; and

she did not venture to raise her eyes to his face, as she faultered out: "I had hoped that this trial would have been spared: however I may value your friendship, however I may prize your good opinion, I cannot, indeed I cannot, promise more. I am sensible that you pay me the highest compliment which man can pay to woman: and I entreat you to believe that I am grateful for your preference; but gratitude is the warmest feeling with which I can repay you."

"And yet;" said Daubigny in the cold tone of suppressed emotion: "no one who looks upon Miss Marden will believe that she is incapable of feeling deeply and ardently—it must therefore be my peculiar misfortune not to possess those qualities which are calculated to awaken her softer sympathies; and to deplore that another should have better studied the art of pleasing."

Mary shook back her long dark ringlets, and looked up in wonder.

"Surely Miss Marden does not desire that I should be more explicit:"—pursued Daubigny, as he bent over her, and looked steadily into her eyes; "her own heart must be her best interpreter—but I will at least avoid the discourtesy of compelling a confidence;—and while one hope remains, I owe it to myself never to desist from a pursuit on which are hinged all the future blessings of my existence."

"Can we not continue to be friends?" murmured out Mary.

"No, Madam"—exclaimed the lover with a partial out-break of the impetuosity which had but an hour before so startled the simple minded Mr. Marden: "in this case there can be no half measures:—we must be every thing or nothing to each other—mine is not a nature to brook contempt; I cannot stand coldly by, and see my heart's best treasure wrenched from me, without an effort to save myself from such moral ruin:—Mary! Mary! you know not what you

do——" And the breath came sobbingly from between his clenched teeth as he turned gloomily away.

"Indeed, indeed you wrong me;" said the trembling girl; "I feel for you nothing but kindness: I would fain see you happy—have I not known you for years? have I not ever been to you as a sister? does not the love which I bear to your family——"

"Mock me not with that idle tale!" exclaimed Daubigny; "for your sake I would sacrifice every thing—I ask for no love, diluted by its partition among a family—I woo you as a man, and as a man I would win you;—and I would rather that the whole world were hateful to you, could I but secure to myself your undivided affection—the time for temporising is past; I feel that I have a rival, and that a few weeks have strangely changed me—I am a desperate man—It has been said;" he added after a momentary silence; "that my veins run ice; I may yet live to prove that the stream has

turned to fire.—I am in your hands, to make or mar as you may see fit; but beware how you decide—others may not be beyond my vengeance even though you should be able to protect yourself—do you remember, Miss Marden, that David Rizzio was struck as he clung to the robe of his royal mistress? It was a fearful proof of the omnipotence of vengeance."

Mary looked up aghast; her very lips were white: visions of horror crowded upon her brain, and the form of Howard, the mild, the gentle Howard, was prominent in all; she strove to speak, but the words died soundless upon her tongue, and after the exertion of a moment, she sank back on the sofa in a state of partial insensibility.

The sight of her distress wrought an instant change in the feelings of Daubigny: he bent his knee beside her, he clasped her cold hand in his, he wildly besought her to pardon a violence which had been caused by the agonising fear of losing her; he even

cursed himself, in his sudden remorse, that he had so wantonly trifled with her feelings; and conjured her to look up, and promise that she would be his. Never more would he thus yield himself up to passion; he would become as a child in her hands—she should be the guide, the model, of his after-life—he would be to her more than man had ever yet been to woman. Mary listened in terror, but she made no reply; never before had she witnessed so terrible an exhibition of human passion, and she yet asked herself if it could be indeed reality!

"Mary;" said Daubigny at length, in a tone of deep despondency; "you have no faith in my promises of amendment; and yet you, who are the cause of my fault, should scarcely be an unrelenting judge; could you but read my heart, you would see that love for you is the one light which inhabits it—errors I may have; vices, if you so desire to call them; but as yet I have not sinned towards you; not a vow that I have breathed, not an assurance that I have uttered,

but might be registered in Heaven for all eternity:—what you may make of me, I know not, for I have ventured my whole stock of happiness on this cast, and, if you persist in your present coldness, I care not how my career may terminate. Should you become my wife, I trust that much which is good may be awakened within me, and that I may, through your means, become the friend of my fellow men—but if I leave this house once more with the curse of your scorn upon me, I have a fearful foreboding that the thick springing evil of my nature will spread its blight far and wide about my path—your's is a terrible responsibility—look well, Mary, how you exercise it, both for yourself and for others."

"What can I say?" exclaimed Mary wringing her hands; "why will you compel me to utter a truth which will be unwelcome? wherefore do you persist in forcing me to declare that I can never love you?"

Daubigny started from his knee with a sharp ringing laugh. "Is it come to this?" he asked,

as he ground his teeth, and looked fiercely down upon his victim; "*never*, said you? then hear me, in my turn, since all temporising terms are over between us, and we at length speak plainly—listen to me, Miss Marden;" and he drew a chair close to the sofa on which she was yet seated, with that calm collectedness of manner which is one of the most frightful attributes of intense passion. "Let us at once fully understand each other: I have not poured out upon you the whole flood of my heart's passion—I have not humbled before you the pride of my haughty spirit, to suffer another to laugh out his hated scorn at my baffled hopes—When you have deemed me distant, my eye has been upon you—when your thoughts have been on another and a dearer object, my ear has drunk in your words—the miser leaves not his hoarded gold to the keeping of a stranger — the mariner entrusts not the guidance of his bark to an unknown helmsman—nor did I coldly abandon the one treasure of my existence to the wiles of

a new suitor—I have dogged the steps of the beggar Howard, as the blood-hound tracks his prey—I have looked on him in his fancied solitude, when your name has been upon his lips, and your image in his heart—I was no easy dupe; you love him, and for his sake I am spurned — You start, Madam, but I have more to tell:—if you care not for yourself—if you are still willing to sacrifice all your future prospects to your favoured minion, you will, perhaps, have some pity on your gray-haired father—he is in my power.—Ha! have I then, at last, aroused you from your apathy? do you tremble? I have done more for your sake, I have wept—*wept*, man as I am, tears which have scalded me as they fell—and this for your sake; but you cared not for my tears, you spurned my agony, and I looked about me for revenge. You shrink at such an admission—I can appreciate your horror; your more pious suitor would tell you that revenge is an un-

christian passion, and, perhaps, it is; the sin dwells with those who called it forth."

"You spoke of my father,"—faultered out Mary.

"I did, and I thank you that you have recalled me to my subject. Madam, the very home in which I now address you is pledged to three times its value; your father has raised a large sum of money on usurious interest to forward a speculation, by which he trusted to improve your fortunes, and which has utterly failed—I have bought up both the mortgage-deed and the bonds—one word from me—"

"Oh! spare him—spare my father!" shrieked Mary springing from the sofa, and throwing herself at his feet; "if you are a man, have mercy on his grey hairs!"

"Rather have mercy upon him yourself;" said Daubigny, as he looked down upon the fair young creature who knelt before him; "his fate is in your hands—I would fain have saved you this suffering, Miss Marden; for lightly as

you may hold my affection, it would at least have taught me, had you returned it, to conceal from you the utter ruin of your house; but you have wrung the avowal from me, and now I warn you not to provoke me too utterly—I will give you time to think—your father knows not that I am privy to his embarrassments; his pride, as well as his credit, may be spared; and I here swear to you that if you will solemnly pledge yourself to become my wife, I will at once destroy every document which I hold, and release him from all his engagements—I will be to him as a son, duteous and obedient; and to you a husband, tender, careful, and confiding—I will cast from me every memory of your coldness, and cherish you as though you had repaid my love with a more ready trust."

Mary only looked up at him in silent misery.

"Rise, Miss Marden;" he continued, as he extended his hand towards her, and she obeyed as if unconsciously; "we have, by some strange

mistake, reversed our appropriate positions—I see that you do not give me credit for my professions, but I here aver that you wrong me by such a doubt; my love for you has grown so imperceptibly that it has become a principle of my existence, and I strive in vain to weaken its influence:—either you become my wife, or I am lost to every good impulse. And where, think you, that I shall first wreak my hate? even on the authors of my ruin—on the young hypocrite whose smile has blighted me—on the old man, whose blandishments have deluded me—and on the false syren whose averted looks have withered me into a demon—think of this, Mary;" and again his voice sank almost to a whisper; "think of your father's broken heart—of his self-reproach—of his dying agonies; when he remembers that his own wild speculations have beggared his only child—think of Howard, hunted from his humble home—for he *shall* be hunted forth! and of your own desolate lot.—Mary! I am a desperate man, and

I here vow to you that my own mother shall not receive you beneath her roof if you spurn my love; and now, look upon the reverse of the picture—be mine, and your fond father shall be at once restored to comparative affluence — your own wishes shall be anticipated, your every fancy indulged—and even Howard, the hated cause of all your coldness, shall be not only spared, but served; I will exert every energy to forward his interests, and he shall never know from what hand the blessing is poured forth—You see that I am not yet all evil—decide therefore whether it be your will that I become so."

Mary only replied by sinking once more at his feet.

"I accept the symbol;" said Daubigny, as he encircled her slight figure with his arm, and replaced her in her seat. "I feel that you are mine; but mark me, Mary, the compact into which we have entered must not be stained by tears; to offer yourself as a victim were but to

provoke the enquiries of your father, and how could you reply?"

"Do I weep?" asked Mary, with a cold firmness of tone which startled even the selfish Daubigny: "surely tears were a mockery in such a grief as mine."

"Beware—" said her companion, and his bloodless lips quivered as he spoke; "from you I can bear much, very much, but even I may be tried beyond my strength."

"Oh! think not so;" exclaimed the pale girl with a sudden burst of energy which called the crimson to her brow: "do I not yet sit beside you, breathing, feeling, speaking? It is a fable—the heart *cannot* break!"

"Mary," said Daubigny gloomily, "words avail nothing—I have risked all to win you—my wealth—my good name—my very soul—I cannot be foiled now; the stake is too mighty."

"You swear to save my father?"

"I swear—and look you, Mary; I ask you

not to trust to words alone; here are the parchments—" and as he spoke, Daubigny drew a packet from his bosom, and holding it over the lamp, it instantly ignited.

" You vow never to injure—"

" Howard, you would say;" broke in Daubigny impetuously: " I have already pledged myself to serve him—England is wide enough: I will secure to him a prouder home elsewhere."

" I am compelled to trust you;" said Mary in a hollow tone;—" the rest is comparatively easy; Reginald Daubigny, I am your affianced wife."

" Look at least as though you did not loathe the compact;" murmured her companion deprecatingly.

" What would you more of me?" asked Mary in the cold tone of partial unconsciousness; " have I not said that I was ready to become your wife?"

" I would ask you to love me."

Mary sadly shook her head.

"Then:" said Daubigny sternly, "I would counsel you to obey me."

"I am ready," replied Mary, as she crossed her arms meekly on her breast.

"Woman!" murmured Daubigny, as he bent over her, and the words came hissingly through his clenched teeth: "as you value your own welfare, do not drive me mad!—— Mary!" and the hot tears fell rapidly on his cheek: "save me from myself while there is yet time—you know not how I love you—'tis folly—'tis madness—only smile, Mary; only smile in token that you do not hate me; and I will kneel, and bless you!"

Mary *did* smile: but Daubigny hastily averted his eyes—and then sinking on his knees, he buried his face in the cushion of the sofa on which she sat, and his sobs smote even on the ear of the half-unconscious girl: after a while he looked up; his look was fierce and fevered: "It is time that this interview should ter-

minate;" he said in a smothered tone: "farewell, Mary: I ask you not to hold our conference sacred; for your father's sake, for your own, you will keep the secret:—remember! you are mine—and now, one kiss ere we part—nay! are you not my affianced wife? have I not sinned to win you? and shall I not be paid the price of my transgression? You turn away from me still, Mary—had it been Howard, perhaps—"

"Have I not pledged my faith?" asked Mary hoarsely, as she raised her fair brow to his; and with passionate energy he impressed the first long kiss of love upon her lips.

CHAPTER IV.

The Elms, the noble seat of the Daubignys, was a lovely spot. The house, a fine specimen of Elizabethan architecture, stood on a wide lawn which sloped gently down to the bank of a noble river. A vast forest stretched far away on the right hand, while on the left, the eye wandered over a wide extent of finely cultivated country. In the immediate neighbourhood of the house every thing betrayed the constant care with which it was tended, and

the prosperity of its inmates. The young trees were securely fenced round to protect them from the attacks of the deer which clustered in mighty herds among the more ancient timber, or sported amid the sunshiny glades which spread bright and beautiful between them. The fine avenue of chesnuts which traversed the entire length of the Park, threw not out one withered bough to mar the long line of its verdant magnificence; and the terrace-vases were rich in all the costly and exotic blossoms of the season.

Such was the exterior of The Elms; nor did its internal arrangements do any discredit to its imposing effect from without. Rich and costly hangings, rare and precious cabinets, a library whose value was almost beyond computation; and mighty mirrors in which beauty might sun herself, nor lose the reflection of a single charm; while in one apartment at least, these were relieved by those lighter and more graceful ornaments with which modern taste

has delighted to overstrew the dwellings of the wealthy and the luxurious. Here a Cupid bent his alabaster bow, and appeared in the very act of launching his unfailing arrow — there a vase filled with the mimic flowers of Dresden, seemed to challenge the nature which it pourtrayed so perfectly—on one side the eye fell upon a screen of Indian fabric—on the other upon some exquisite bauble from sunny Italy—while thrown carelessly upon a sofa of rose-coloured satin, lay that most graceful of all instruments, a lute ; and beside it a snowy glove of such minute proportions, that of itself it told a tale of beauty.

Near the sofa, closely folded in her cachemire, and leaning languidly in a large and cushioned chair, sat a lady whose still lovely face was so full of that pure and feminine expression of endearing helplessness, blended with a higher and holier charm, which is the noblest characteristic of female beauty, that no one who looked on her was tempted to regret that

she had passed the morning of life, and was now rapidly approaching toward its evening. Sickness, and it seemed, sorrow also had slightly touched her; they had bowed, but not bruised her beauty, and had given, as it were, an etherialized expression to her high and ample brow, and to her large, dark, shadowy eyes, which must have been wanting where grief had never come. She was evidently buried in thought; and at times she breathed, as if unconsciously, a sigh so deep that it seemed to come from the very depths of her spirit.

Her reverie was at length terminated by the entrance of a younger, and some would have said, a still more lovely, female. The beauty of Miss Daubigny was of that striking description which at once rivets the astonished gaze of a stranger. Her tall commanding person, her delicately moulded limbs, her brightly flashing black eyes, and the air of easy and yet somewhat imperious command which sat upon

her proud brow like a diadem; combined to form a beauty eminently calculated to produce its instantaneous effect. Nor was Miss Daubigny altogether unconscious of her personal advantages; and this feeling of self-appreciation had not tended to diminish the haughtiness of her expression. Yet was she amiable, loving, and domestic in her tastes: towards her mother she was all gentleness, for to so energetic a spirit as her own, there was a spell in the sweet subduedness of Mrs. Daubigny's melancholy temperament; on Reginald alone did she ever turn a dark brow and a cold eye; for the more tenderly she cherished her mother, the more bitterly she felt that her brother shared not in the feeling. To her there was a charm even in the failing health of the uncomplaining invalid, while it did but excite the impatience of the more fiery Reginald.

"Have you slept, dear mother?" she asked gently, as she leant over the chair of Mrs. Daubigny, and laid upon her lap a cluster of Pro-

verse roses; "or have you been looking out upon this lovely sun-set? it is quite an evening for those who are learned in fairy-lore, to see the merry little imps congregating under the painted canopies of the flowers, ere they go forth into the moon-light; nay, for aught I know, in bringing to you this rose-branch, I may have laid Titania and half her Court at your feet, or even made captive the doughty Oberon himself."

"I have not slept, love; I did not wish to sleep;" replied Mrs. Daubigny with a gentle smile; "nor were my thoughts, Honoria, so fancifully employed as your own: I have been thinking of my boy."

"And what of him, dearest mother? you can never follow the flights of his restless spirit."

"But I can nevertheless pray that they may become less excursive—would to heaven that Mary Marden could have loved him—"

"Mary!" echoed her daughter: "it were

like placing the dove in the nest of the eagle—Reginald would break her heart."

"My *dear* Honoria—" interposed the invalid deprecatingly; "the world is ever too prompt to whisper evil—the voice of kindred should be the last uplifted to blame."

"I am rebuked, madam;" was the submissive reply; "but in my anxiety for my friend, I was careless that I reproached my brother."

"I think—" pursued Mrs. Daubigny; "that the influence of Mary is the last, lingering hope which is now left to us, of taming down the reckless nature of Reginald: in her I confess that I have still a most perfect trust; and he loves her so utterly, that towards her, he never surely could be unjust."

"Did I dare to remind you of your own fate—" murmured Honoria.

Mrs. Daubigny started; and a shade of anguish swept over her high, calm brow, as she raised her eyes to Heaven, and then bowed her head meekly upon her breast.

"My dear, dear mother!" whispered the voice of her daughter, as the tearful girl cast herself on an ottoman at her feet, and pressed her wasted hand fondly to her lips. "Forgive me—I spoke without reflection—and now, let us talk of Reginald; I will wish any thing, every thing, which is calculated to restore your peace of mind—I will even desire to see Mary his wife; for if you are anxious that it should be so, I feel that it must be right."

"No, my sweet child;" said Mrs. Daubigny: "I am rebuked for my selfishness—The pang was a sharp one, Honoria, and yet I can thank you for it. My own trial, my own sufferings, should have made me merciful, and not taught me, in order to save my own child, to seek for another victim—I have been permitted to brave the hurricane; the timid and trembling Mary would be crushed by its violence."

"Believe me it is better as it is, dear mother; the indomitable pride of Reginald will soon

teach him to overcome this first passion, and then I hope that he will present you with a daughter-in-law better calculated to contend with the miseries of a married life."

Mrs. Daubigny only shook her head.

"What think you of a spirit like my own, for example?" continued Honoria, striving to assume a gayer tone; "a female Hotspur, loving the very atmosphere of storms, and breathing the breath of the hurricane with delight—a creature of contention, who will pick you a quarrel with her lap-dog, but she will exercise her energies — a domestic politician, who admits no despotism but her own, and the murmurs of whose spent passion die away through space like the echoes of distant thunder—would not such a woman revenge her sex?"

"Have you indeed sketched from the life, my Honoria?" asked Mrs. Daubigny fondly, as she strove to smile in requital of her daughter's efforts to divert her thoughts: "how will

Sir Willoughby Bransdon appreciate such a portrait, think you?"

Honoria playfully put up her lip, and tossed her proud head in pretty contempt: Sir Willoughby is a false knight:—but I will summon a servant with lights; for just now, I have not sentiment enough to dare the twilight."

The fond eye of Mrs. Daubigny followed the graceful form of her daughter as she traversed the apartment, and a calm smile settled upon her lips: it was easy to see that here at least, her thoughts had found a happy resting-place.

When the curtains were closely drawn, the bright lamps scattered through the apartment, and the servants had again withdrawn, the conversation between the mother and child was resumed. Honoria still occupied the ottoman, and held the hand of the invalid in hers; the light of one of the lamps fell full upon her, and rested brightly upon her high brow, with its dark and glossy braids of raven hair; and was

flashed back by her large and lustrous eyes, as she communed with her mother. Even that mother, accustomed as she was to look upon her beauty, bent over her in admiring tenderness; and smoothed back the shining clusters of her hair, and pressed her lips to the glowing cheek which was turned towards her, with a proud fondness which gave a momentary energy to her manner.

"I have at least a child who loves me," she said after a pause, rather giving voice to her own thoughts than addressing her companion; "a fair and gentle child—my heart is not yet quite a waste: a green spot of happiness breaks the monotony of its sterile surface on which my spirit can fold its weary wing, and be at peace. Honoria—" and the beautiful girl looked up at the pale cheek of her mother: "on you rest all my hopes; I know not wherefore, but to-night every thought of Reginald which rises in my breast comes coupled with a pang; suffering may have weakened me; sorrows may

have wasted me; but never until to-night did I cling so utterly to you; and you will not desert me, my fair girl:—neither you, nor the amiable man who has won you to himself, and who is even now dear to me as a son—in your love I am at least secure."

"What means this unwonted emotion, my own mother?" exclaimed Honoria, as Mrs. Daubigny sank back with the shiver of exhaustion, upon her cushions; "Reginald has many faults, and his manner towards yourself is not the least; but he must love you, dear mother, he *must*—who that knows you loves you not? He is hot, impetuous, and inconsiderate; but the errors of his head may not have touched his heart—remember what his career has been,—master at so early an age of a princely income; courted by his equals, flattered and fawned upon by his dependents; possessed of violent feelings and an unyielding spirit, we must rather deplore than wonder at the result. I am not myself untainted by the

same faults; but my trial was a less decided one, and consequently my escape has been comparatively easy—"

"It is in vain, my generous girl;" said Mrs. Daubigny: "there is a pang at my heart which even your noble self-sacrifice cannot alleviate; you are, indeed, both my children, but alas! my feelings towards you are only too dissimilar."

"In that case, madam;" said the voice of Daubigny, who suddenly stood before them, with a flushed brow and a flashing eye: "I have at least acted wisely in creating an interest for myself in a less obdurate heart—in seeking to inspire in a stranger that love which I had failed to secure from my own relatives."

"Reginald;" faultered out the spirit-stricken mother; "why will you thus gratuitously misinterpret alike my motives and my words? did you know the sleepless nights, the anxious days, which love for you has cost me, you would not thus mercilessly harrow up my feelings."

"Well, madam;" said Daubigny "we will

not pursue a subject which should long since have been worn threadbare—we will, if you please, reserve the enumeration of my iniquities for a more appropiate occasion; for at this moment you may perceive that I am in no mood to listen to the catalogue."

"You are indeed strangely excited:"—said Mrs. Daubigny anxiously, as Reginald traversed the floor with rapid strides; "what can have thus moved you?"

"Excite not yourself, dear mother;" exclaimed Honoria, as she gazed in terror at the quivering lip of the invalid, and the sudden hectic which had risen to her cheek—"Reginald, if you have a heart, speak, and allay your mother's terror."

"The appeal is in itself impotent, Miss Daubigny;" said the young man, with a fierce smile: "I know not at this moment if I indeed have a heart—but I will affect no mystery: I am an affianced bridegroom—a victorious suitor—and trust soon to be the husband of Mary Marden."

"Of Mary Marden?" echoed Honoria incredulously.

"Poor Mary!" murmured Mrs. Daubigny with a hysteric sob, as she buried her face on the bosom of her daughter.

"Have you no congratulation to offer?" demanded Reginald; "you, Madam, to your son? and you, Miss Daubigny, to your brother? the cause, I think, might well warrant such civility."—

"I do, indeed I do, most sincerely pray for your mutual happiness!" earnestly exclaimed Mrs. Daubigny, as she looked up and extended her hand to her son: "but, oh! Reginald, you are about to incur a fearful responsibility; it is a fragile blossom which you are anxious to transplant to your own bosom; a gentle spirit which you are seeking to place in contact with your own—beware, my son, how you blight it by unkindness—nay, look not as though you resented my advice—you are both dear, very dear to me: I have long loved Mary as a se-

cond daughter ; to see you dwelling in happiness together, would be to me a joy beyond all other joys—are you not my own and only son? And does not a mother's heart yearn to her first-born? If I have clung more closely to Honoria of late years than to yourself, can you wonder, Reginald, that it should be so? Has she not been every thing to me? Have I not found refuge in her tenderness, when your cold unkindness has banished me from your own presence? Does she not confide to me every emotion of her young heart? and is not her every care lavished upon my helplessness? Blame me not, then—I am but too anxious to receive from you the same tenderness and the same trust; and when I remember how I strove to retain the love which you have so strangely withdrawn from me, I shudder for Mary Marden. A beautiful young wife, Reginald, is more exacting than a spirit-broken and faded mother; she is jealous of her own power, and looks on every derelic-tion from tenderness as a sin against her prive-

leges: have you temper to cede this, my son? to make her happiness the business of your existence, and to overthrow, at the foot of your new idol, all the passions, prejudices, and peculiarities of your past life? Alas! I fear me that the effort will be too mighty for your strength."

"I have at least not deluded Miss Marden by any specious sophistries, madam: she sees me as I am, and as such she is willing to entrust her happiness to my keeping; I have her plighted word, and I would not now resign my just claim to her hand, though an armed world were arrayed against it."

"Do not imagine that I, on my part, contemplate your approaching marriage with reluctance;" said Mrs. Daubigny; "I do but seek to fasten your thoughts on the new duties which it will necessarily entail upon you—to implore of you to subdue your natural impetuosity, and to induce you to protect, as well as love the fair young creature who is about to become yours. There is no malady so incurable, my son, as a

blighted heart—no misery so utter as an ill-assorted marriage."

Daubigny started; his conscience whispered the conviction that such would be his own, but he was too thoroughly the slave of his selfish passions to waver for a moment in his purpose. Honoria, meanwhile sat by in silence; tears had swelled in her large eyes, but they did not fall, there was a feeling at her heart which checked them as they rose. She knew that all her mother's gentle admonitions were but like the leaves of autumn scattered before the storm-blast; and she read the impatience with which they were endured, in the compressed lips and heaving breast of her brother.

"Reginald;" she said, as she unclasped from her neck a massive chain of gold; "you know how I have long loved our dear Mary—when you see her to-morrow, bear to her this trinket, as a pledge of my heart's welcome to my new sister."

Daubigny obeyed; but as he drew near to

her, and extended his hand to receive the chain, he looked coldly and earnestly into the eyes of Honoria, as if to detect some latent motive; the high-spirited girl met the gaze unmoved, and he hastily averted his head, as he slightly compressed the fair fingers which held the trinket, and said with some emotion:

"I am bound to thank you, Honoria, for this consideration; you at least have acted courteously towards both Miss Marden and myself: even though your congratulations may not have been wordy."

Mrs. Daubigny sighed audibly.

"I should pray your excuses also, I bethink me;" he pursued after a time; "for I remember that I have been guilty of a heavy error towards you; but in sooth I am a sorry love messenger. I am the bearer of a packet from Bransdon, whom I encountered on my way hither; and I trust that its contents, like most lovers' vows, have not melted into thin air during my delay."

As he spoke, he placed in the hands of Honoria a sealed letter. Something like a sigh escaped him as he noticed the eager haste and the deep blush with which it was received—would Mary *so* receive a communication from him? would not her heart rather sink as she contemplated the writing of the suitor who had wrung from her a reluctant promise, and a tardy vow?

His most earnest wish—the one purpose of his life was fulfilled; and yet Daubigny was not happy. Amid the thick-springing evil of his nature, he had one pure feeling; it was his love for Mary; and he was conscious how unworthily he had striven to gratify it—he was aware how wantonly he had sacrificed the peace of her whole life, to ensure to himself a successful termination to his suit. Yet he *had* succeeded—and no happy rival could sneer over his discomfiture—Howard might now weep tears of blood, for Mary never could be his! And the triumph was almost demoniacal with which

Daubigny gloated over the anguish of his humble, and pure spirited, and unconscious victim.

Honoria was absorbed in the letter which he had just put into her hands; Mrs. Daubigny was lying back in her chair, with her face buried in her spread palms, and Daubigny paced to and fro that gorgeous apartment like a troubled spirit. Was this the termination of his day-dream? Mary had indeed promised to be his, but she had rather offered herself as a propitiatory sacrifice for her father, than given herself to him in her young beauty as a willing bride; she had plighted her faith to him, and his lips had rested upon her's; but her heart was not in the pledge, and her lip had trembled as he touched it. The reflection was maddening; for Daubigny felt that he had nursed for her a love which man has seldom lavished upon woman. Had the earth crumbled beneath his feet; and Mary been pillowed on his bosom, for her he would have welcomed ruin, and bade destruction do its worst—while she——the conviction

was terrible, and smiting his forehead wildly with his hands, Daubigny rushed from the room.

"This is almost more than I can support:" said Mrs. Daubigny, suddenly looking up; "my poor mistaken boy!—this is not the bearing of a successful suitor — Honoria, what new misery have we now to encounter? what mystery is this? Reginald never suffers himself to be thus shook by trifles. Some fearful secret is connected with Mary's reception of his addresses which he fears to confide to us—were he other than he is, I would follow him and know the worst, but now—I dare not!"

"Compose yourself, dear mother;" said Honoria soothingly. "It were vain indeed to speculate upon the passionate paroxysms of Reginald—they are beyond all remedy: to me the greatest marvel is the infatuation of Mary Marden; often, in our confidential hours, have I seen her shudder, as I have expatiated on the reckless violence of my brother; often have I

heard her mourn that so gentle a spirit as your own should be ruffled by his uncompromising and selfish nature: but how, thus privy to all his faults, and to all his wilfulness, she can yet voluntarily receive him as a husband, is a problem which I confess that I cannot solve—"

"It is strange indeed;" replied the mother thoughtfully: "and yet Mary is a free agent; we are not dwellers in a land of despotism, where women are victimised to expediency, without the freedom of choice—whence then could arise the anguish of Reginald; for I am convinced that it was anguish which thus unmanned him—has she not been the day-dream of his existence? and now that he has won her, he is even more wretched than while he doubted!"

"Wonders are rife just now;" replied Miss Daubigny; "for Bransdon writes me word that the meek and modest Mr. Howard, with whom you were so much struck when you last visited Marden, has just succeeded, most unexpectedly,

to an immense property, the hoarded gains of forty years of toil under an eastern sky; or, in plain parlance, that a nabob uncle, from whom he had no hopes, and on whom he had no claim, has declared him his sole heir; and thus the insignificant curate of a village church has suddenly grown into fortune and consequence."

"I know not where wealth could have been bestowed more worthily;" said the invalid; "happy must have been the mother of such a son!"

"He will surely leave Marden;" murmured Honoria musingly: "to me it is strange that a man of Howard's feeling should have been so constantly in the society of Mary without loving her; I have often thought, when I have seen them together, how well they were suited to each other."

"Do not breathe such a sentiment before your brother;" said Mrs. Daubigny hastily; "he may have scorned the poor and modest pastor, but now he would appear a formidable

rival; and we have already care enough with which to contend: but what says Sir Willoughby of himself, my love?"

"Little enough, dear mother; and that little in a manner only calculated to interest those who are silly enough to believe that they care for him—he writes principally of me—he fears for my happiness—for yours—he—in short, you can guess at his very inartificial arguments; he has turned phycisian—he recommends change of air for you; and a little wholesome matrimonial restraint for me—is confident that the pure breezes of Sussex and his own watchfulness would renovate your health and spirits; and that an exchange of name would add considerably to my own powers of pleasing—talks of being a dutiful son, and a most loving husband, and so takes his leave."

"And I am convinced that he would be all that, my child; but I hear the foot of Reginald: speak to him, Honoria, for I am sure that he is sick at heart; speak kindly to him, we know

not how much he may require our tenderness."

Miss Daubigny hastened to obey, and as her brother entered, she looked up, and addressed him with a smile. Reginald, on his part, made a visible effort to shake off the gloom which hung upon him; and as he drew his chair closer to her's, murmured something of his having left the room to give her an opportunity of examining her despatch without interruption. The remark recalled to the memory of Honoria the intelligence which she had just obtained, and turning gaily to her brother, she told the tale of Howard's sudden fortune; but the effect of her tidings was electrical—with the laugh of a maniac, Daubigny started from his seat, and clenching his uplifted hands, he exclaimed, while the fire flashed from his eyes:—

"Too late! too late! he is welcome to it all—the gold will but wither in his grasp—the treasure burn into his soul—he cannot pur-

chase with his whole fortune the one pure pearl which is now mine—what care I though he be master of a prostrate world, I can yet trample upon his heart, for *she* is beyond his power—and *she* will weep too—but no matter!—no matter —I have wept tears of blood, and no hand was out-stretched to staunch them. On my soul, I am glad of this! he was too despicable a rival, too insignificant an enemy—but now it is great and glorious to grind him back into the dust from which he has only just emerged, and to turn his prayers to curses!"

And ere Miss Daubigny and her wretched mother could utter one word of beseeching, one accent of entreaty, they were again alone.

CHAPTER V.

Who shall describe the astonishment of Howard, when the tidings of his sudden prosperity reached him in his humble village home! For a time he was bewildered; but as the mist of wonder was dispelled by thought, one bright and beaming form shed lustre over all his mental visions. The gulph between Mary and himself had disappeared — the chain of poverty which had weighed him to the earth was rent asunder— he could now stand erect, and claim his proper station in society, secure that the world's worship would hail him as he advanced to take his place.

Strange power of gold! It were idle to assert that the age of magic has passed away, while this potent talisman remains to negative the declaration. Is it not the key which opens alike the road to power, and the human heart? Can it not command every tangible blessing of this world? Do not crowned kings bow down before it, and mitred bishops do it homage? Can it not purchase power, and pomp, and place; the smiles of beauty, and the servility of crowds? Does not each man plant his olive or his fig-tree, in the hope that it may bear this gorgeous fruit? Is it not all-sufficient? And is not this necromancy? Philosophers may affect to despise it, cynics to disregard it; but let it once be placed within their grasp, and neither philosopher nor cynic will withhold his hand. It is the one master-spirit of the earth, it arrays man against man, covers the wide ocean with floating cities, and peoples the world with discord. To obtain it, men rend asunder the eternal rocks, or dive deep amid the waters of the

mighty seas; to secure it, they separate themselves from their fellows, and read traces of rapine on the brow of every passing stranger. No matter from amid what garbage it has been drawn—by how many tears it has been bedewed—how many lives may have been forfeited—how many hearts may have been broken in its accumulation; still men will bow down and worship it, for it is—gold!

Not thus, however, did Howard estimate it; to him it was hallowed by the thought that he might now murmur in the ear of Mary his hitherto hopeless passion; he knew that had she ever loved him, she was too pure and single-hearted to love him the more because the world's smile had turned upon him; and he almost exulted in his knowledge of the broken fortunes of her race, when he reflected that he now possessed wherewithal to build them up; while he recalled with tenacious delight, every look, and word, and smile, on which he had hitherto not dared to dwell, lest he should be maddened

by his secret misery. How he clung to the remembrance of the sweet evening when they sat together in the Rosery, and she told the tale of her high-minded ancestor; and how he smiled as he recollected the pang with which he had then looked upon her pure pale beauty, and thoughtall other loveliness must fade before her own. He could smile now at the memory of his past anguish, for she might at length be his! —and the calm and gentle Howard felt his brow burn, and his heart throb, as he whispered to himself the welcome truth. Hitherto he had trod the path of life under a shade so deep that he had never striven to dispel it, for he felt the utter futility of the attempt; but now the cloud had suddenly passed away, and his eyes were dazzled by the sunshine amid which he stood.

When he had taken time to recal his scattered thoughts, Howard seized his hat, and bent his steps towards the home of Mary; his path lay through the richly wooded park, and

never had it appeared to him to be so beautiful. He looked on the old oaks, and he could have worshipped their gnarled and knotted trunks; he lingered beneath the richer foliage of the fan-like chesnuts, and he thought of the love which Mary bore to the sweet solitude of that wooded wilderness: not a bird which warbled among the boughs but to his ear poured forth a song of gladness, and the very sky looked bluer and more beautiful than it had ever before seemed.

How sweet a thing is hope! it lends music to the woods, a voice to the silence, and a charm to the already fair face of nature. It soothes our sorrows, it mingles in all our pleasures, it relieves the gloomy present by the promise of a sunny future; and it leads us on as by a spell, over the rough paths of a stony world, to the imaginary Arcadia where we are to tread on rose-leaves, under a sky over which no storm-cloud has ever passed!

In this happy mood did Howard slowly tra-

verse Marden Park; slowly, for his musings were so delicious that he would not violate the sanctity of their enjoyment by that rapidity of motion which would have broken up his reverie. Every object by which he was surrounded spoke to him of Mary; many brought with them memories which almost changed his hope into "the sober certainty of waking bliss." And yet, Howard could not have put these memories into words; like the humming-bird of the tropics (and surely the comparison is more than usually admissible?) bright and animated as they were, they were yet comparatively untangible; he could follow them with his mental eye, but he could not grasp them. Still they were full of enjoyment, for, conscious as he was of the perfect purity of Miss Marden's mind, he was perfectly aware that slight as the proofs of regard for him which she had involuntarily suffered to escape her, might appear to an indifferent eye, they were sufficiently conclusive of her feelings to warrant him in the convic-

tion that, although she would not "unsought be won," she had, at least, not been altogether insensible to his silent and respectful attachment.

Poor Howard! had he known how the dreams of that green-wood walk were to terminate, he might well have wished for it a life-long duration; but when he at length reached the Hall, he ascended the steps with a buoyancy of heart to which he had hitherto been a stranger. Mr. Marden was seated in the sunny morning-room which was the favorite retreat of his daughter; the honey-suckle and the creeping-rose were peering into the open window; while beneath it beds of costly tulips spread wide their flaunting and scentless cups to the light; and clusters of sweeter and more modest blossoms, blushed in their beauty beside their more gaudy neighbours. The song of the blackbird came cheerily from a neighbouring acacia, and the warm sun-shine streamed gaily into the cheerful-looking apartment. Here

too were the work-table of Mary, her favorite books, and her harp; and the happy Howard smiled as he thought how perfectly the scene was in sympathy with the glad feelings of his spirit.

"I never remember to have heard tidings which gave me more sincere pleasure;" said the old gentleman, when Howard had told the tale of his sudden prosperity: "but you must not desert us, my young friend; you must not abandon the neighbourhood, and thus tempt us to regret your good fortune; if you behave generously towards us, you will purchase an estate in the county, and so enable those who esteemed and loved you in your poverty to continue to esteem and love you in your prosperity; how say you, Howard, will you become one of us?"

The breast of the young man heaved, and the blood mounted even to his hair-roots, as he said with strong emotion: "My future plans, sir, will be principally decided by yourself."

"By me!" exclaimed Mr. Marden, seizing his hand, and giving it a hearty shake; "then we are sure of you, and we will be parted only by a park paling; but you must have mercy of we quiet-going country gentlemen, and not bewilder the brains of the county by any eastern exhibitions of luxury; for remember that we cannot be expected to compete with a nabob."

"And yet, sir;" smiled the young curate: "I shall commence my new career by what you will, I fear, consider as a piece of most unpardonable presumption."

"I am sorry to hear it, very sorry;" said the kind-hearted old man gravely: "people will be so apt to accuse you of having done it on the strength of your recently acquired wealth."

"And, for once, rumour will be correct, sir:" was the reply, "for most assuredly had fortune dealt less profusely by me, I should never have ventured on such a step."

Mr. Marden shook his head with a look of sincere regret.

"The world is so prone to judge harshly, Howard; and it so frequently suffers its better feeling to be overwhelmed by its envy in such a case as yours, that I entreat of you to pause ere you venture upon any step which may prove unpopular."

"Will you at least suffer me to explain, ere you dissuade?" asked the young man; and having received an affirmative gesture from his companion, he resumed more earnestly.

"Poor as I have hitherto been, sir, I have yet possessed too much pride to sacrifice my own feelings of propriety and self-respect to the indulgence of my selfish gratification. What I have suffered in mind for the last few months, by the conflict between my passion and my principles, it were idle indeed to affect to explain to you. Poverty, even solitary and silent, is bitter enough; but had I possessed sufficient influence to have induced another to share it, I was well aware that such companionship would have rendered it tenfold more insupport-

able; and that I had indeed no right to subject a fairer and a more fragile being to deprivations which were scarcely endurable even to myself——You look surprised, sir: but I was too young for a stoic, and too honest for a hypocrite; I could not seek to win a heart which I well knew that I could never hope to wear: though I loved Miss Marden with all the ardour of a first and only affection, I respected her happiness too truly to shake it by the intelligence that she had rendered another miserable for life: and still less did I seek to awaken in her bosom a sentiment towards myself which would but have made her a partaker in my own hopeless wretchedness——and yet—accuse me not, I beseech you, of the empty coxcombry of vanity, if I venture to assert that there have been moments when I have fondly and yet fearfully believed that I was not altogether such an alien to the heart of Miss Marden as, for her own sake, I had almost taught myself to wish that I

might be. Need I say that it was after this conviction had grown upon me in spite of myself, that I forbore to indulge in that constant companionship with the object of my perpetual thoughts, which, through your friendship and kindness, had so long been permitted to me; and that, even when in her presence, I turned tremblingly alike from the glances of her soft eye, and the murmurs of her sweet voice? And now my tale is told—my heart and its best hopes are laid bare before you—my happiness is in your hands—my wealth (worthless indeed if it should fail to restore to me my peace of mind,) is at your feet—say but that you will not negative my suit to Miss Marden, and I am the most blessed of men."

"Howard;" said the old gentleman, deeply affected; "both for my daughter andfor myself, I thank you; I maintained from the first day on which I saw you that you were a good man, and I was right; your sentiments do you honour, and had I a son, I would pray that his principles

might resemble yours. But my own feelings towards you must, at this moment, be of comparatively trifling import: you would ask me concerning those of Mary, and there, I confess to you in all sincerity, that I am unable to reply. I know not if you are aware that Reginald Daubigny has long loved her; and that, too, with an ardour which has convinced me that he will never, while one hope remains, abandon the pursuit. He was with me only yesterday, and in compliance with his urgent entreaty, he had a private interview with Mary; he was on his arrival uncertain of her determination on the subject, but on what terms they parted, I know not; for Mary, who complained of a slight indisposition last evening, has found it since increase upon her sufficiently to induce her to remain in her own room this morning."

"Have I then no hope of seeing Miss Marden?"

"I fear not; and indeed, my dear young

friend, I am not quite sure that I am not guilty of a species of petty treason in expressing such a fear; for I have so unequivocally favoured the addresses of Daubigny, that, secure as I should feel in confiding the happiness of my child to your keeping, I do not consider myself authorised to give my personal encouragement to another; however, in this case Mary must decide for herself; and in no way whatever will I seek to influence her decision."

"I cannot ask or desire more;" said Howard, and his accent was not quite that of despair. "I am truly sensible of your kind opinion, and shall feel bound to abide by the determination of Miss Marden—to-morrow perhaps—"

"I have not a word to say;" laughed the old gentleman; "you know your way, and that you are always welcome here:—we dine at six; make your own arrangements therefore, and I can answer for your having, at least a friendly reception."

Howard warmly expressed his thanks.

"I shall soon begin to consider myself a person of no little consequence," pursued Mr. Marden gaily; "when I have the finest young men in the county dancing attendance on me; though after all I am afraid that mine will only prove to be reflected greatness. Well, well, we all have our day; I had mine; and I must e'en submit now to be thrust aside to make way for new comers. So you have taken up your hat; if you are bound to Marden, and will go through the Park, I will bear you company as far as the King's Oak. I suppose you know that Marden has many regal reminiscences, of which we are no little proud; and that fine old oak, which was partially scathed by lightning a few years since, and which stands so picturesquely on the rise beyond the laurel walk, is an object of our peculiar veneration; as we have it on record that beneath its branches Charles the Second, on a visit to Marden, which I regret to say did him little credit either as a man or a monarch, stood for

some time in conversation with a certain Sir Everhard Moreland, a young gallant of the Court, after the unsuccessful issue of a profligate adventure—you must make Mary tell you the story, for I have little memory for such things."

The young curate only smiled, for he immediately recognised the tale to which the old gentleman referred; and when they had at length reached the oak, and Mr. Marden had parted from him with a smile and a cordial shake of the hand, Howard once more abandoned himself to a train of hopeful and happy thought. Mary might indeed have had an interview with Daubigny, but he remembered how he had parted from her at the village path, but a short while after their conference in the Rosery; and he dwelt complacently on the memory of that conference: for although no word of love had been spoken by either, there had been a depth in the tones, and a softness in the eyes of Miss Marden, which he yet remembered, with a feeling of blended pride and

hope. He had touched her hand as they parted, and he had fancied that it trembled as he clasped it, though she smiled as she bade him farewell; this, at least, the heart of Howard whispered to his reason looked not as though he had a rival. They had parted; and even as he entered his cottage home, he had reproached himself for thus weakly yielding to a dream which never could be realized: yet how soon had his heart again swelled high, and his breast heaved; for there, awaiting him, lay the packet which told him that a new existence had opened before him — that his path was to be henceforward one of luxury and indulgence—that he was wealthy beyond his wildest hopes! Howard withdrew the hat from his brow, and literally gasped for breath—he pressed his hand upon his forehead, as if to collect his scattered senses; and when he had indeed assured himself that he did not dream, then rose broad and bright before him a golden future, with the form of Mary Marden floating in the midst.

Now again, as he re-trod the grassy path, which they had so lately traversed together, the same sweet vision bore him company; and he started, as he advanced into the deepest recess of the Rosery, to behold the embodyment of his thoughts palpably before him. It was indeed Miss Marden; she was seated on the margin of the fountain which threw up its slender thread of water under the shadow of the tall trees; her bonnet had been withdrawn, and lay on the grass beside her; her cheek was as white as the marble against which she leant, and there was a heaviness about her eyes which told a tale of tears. The tread of Howard upon the turf roused her from her reverie, and, as she looked up, the unbidden crimson rushed painfully over her cheeks and forehead; and the faint smile with which she extended her hand to welcome him was so evidently one of pain, that as he took it, he looked earnestly into her eyes, as though he would read there the history of her secret grief.

"I am fated to encounter Mr. Howard whenever I am tempted to play truant;" she said, with an embarrassment which was palpable even through her effort to appear composed: "I have but just left my room, and believed, though I fear vainly, that the sweet air and the deep solitude of my favourite haunt might restore me."

"And I intrude—" said Howard, retreating a few paces.

"By no means—you are ever welcome; and truly my own thoughts are not such pleasant ones that I should seek to keep them company."

The words were kind; and yet there was a flutter, a timid restlessness in the manner of Miss Marden; an unquiet and far-searching gaze, which Howard could not interpret; her ordinary bearing was so mild, so self-governed, that he was instantly convinced of the existence of some adventitious cause for her evident agitation.

"Solitude has been but a sad medicine in

your case, I fear," he said gently, as he again approached; "I trust that you are not likely to suffer long thus."

"Oh, no—" sighed Mary, "I shall soon be better;" and she immersed her hand in the cool water, and pressed it heavily upon her burning eye-balls.

"Mary!" murmured Howard, seating himself beside her.

Miss Marden withdrew her hand, and looked wildly towards him.

"How shall I tell my tale," exclaimed the young man hurriedly: "how shall I profane your gentle ears by talking of gold? And yet I must do this, or you will scorn me as a selfish madman—I am wealthy, Miss Marden; suddenly, almost incalculably wealthy—I have long loved you—you must have seen and known this—and now—"

"Hush!" said Mary wildly, as she pressed her finger upon her lip, and gazed hastily and

earnestly around her: "I must not listen to this—go, and be happy—go, and make others so—you can do both—go, and carry with you the blessing of a broken heart—"

"What mean you?" cried Howard, agonized alike by her words and looks: "do you spurn me? Do you trample upon a heart whose every pulse has long throbbed only for you? do you cast back upon me a love which is destroying my existence?"

"Talk not to me of love:" whispered Miss Marden: "'tis crime—'tis madness—but yesterday I might have listened, and now I dare not—"

"You are ill, Mary;" said Howard soothingly; "you are excited — be calm, and hearken to me—"

"Again I say I dare not:" hoarsely interposed the wretched girl, and there was almost fierceness in the look which she turned upon him; "would you make me still more wretched than you now see me?"

Howard rose—he moved a short distance from her, and then he spoke—"Miss Marden, I am not the selfish wretch whom you believe me to be:—in loving you until yesterday, I voluntarily clung to an affection, which, however it might exalt the idol, could but wither the worshipper—yet I cared not for myself—I would have died at your feet, could I in expiring have secured your happiness—I would have sacrificed my own prospects—poor and pitiful they were, *that* I am ready to admit, but still they were *my all!*—could I by this self-immolation have hoped to brighten yours—yesterday indeed—but why trouble you with such a tale? why tell you that fortune has suddenly raised me to the highest pitch of affluence, only to mock me by thus plunging me, through your agency, into the darkest depths of wretchedness?"

"And did you really love me?" cried Mary suddenly springing to his side, and pressing her small hand heavily on his arm: "Oh! wherefore, Howard, have you told me this! why

have you taught me that there must be two victims?"

"I cannot comprehend you—" said Howard, instantly conciliated by her evident emotion: "surely you could not doubt how deeply, how devotedly I loved you—"

"I have sometimes whispered it to myself;" said Mary abstractedly: "my heart had registered so many gentle looks, so many kindly tones; that I have often thought it might be thus — yet:" she pursued, turning hurriedly towards her companion "yet you said not that you loved me—"

"Could I ask you to share the fortunes of a beggar?"

"Howard:" said Mary reproachfully, "you know me not—but this is idle: nay more, 'tis impious—I am an affianced wife!"

Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet, the young curate could not have sprung more suddenly aside:—a deep groan burst from his

over-charged heart, and he cast himself heavily on the green sward.

Mary stood firm: her white lips quivered, and her eyes followed him as he fell, as though they would have burst from their burning lids; but she did not stir a limb, "Howard!" she murmured after a time; and the wretched young man looked up in despairing earnestness: "Howard, if you indeed love me, have mercy on me now;—only yesterday I was free:—now however I may writhe, I cannot burst my bonds—yet despise me not, I could not survive your scorn—I am no willing bride—I go not to the altar with a lie upon my lips—I have been bought at a price—more than this I dare not tell you; but the price must be paid. Howard, I knew not until within the last few hours what a spring of misery lies hidden within the human heart, ready to be unlocked—but I know it now—I have heard that sorrow kills; I once thought it a dark fable, yet now I cling to it as my brightest hope. You are rich, you

tell me—Oh! seek not to make victims with your gold, lest the pang recoil upon your own heart—affection is not to be purchased; that is a poor deceit, nursed by self-love, and fed by sophistries: the love of woman is a holy thing; it is beyond all bribe."

"And yet—" commenced Howard hoarsely.

"Yet I told you that I was bought at a price: but do you indeed think so meanly of me, as to believe that gold, or power, or luxury, were the lure? Howard, again I tell you that you do not know me—mine is a higher and a holier aim."

"It may not yet be irrevocable—"

"It is—it must—even were I taunted with an offer of freedom, I *dare* not emancipate myself—I *dare* not—the forfeit would be fearful! not for myself would I have done this; — for there is something terrible in the thought of a life-long bondage—a home without affection—an existence without hope!"

"For whom then, Mary, do you thus offer yourself as a victim?"

"You have done well by that question, to recal me to myself;" said Miss Marden, with an effort at composure: "I had forgotten that my very words were no longer free, that my very thoughts might become crime:—I must not answer you."

"'Tis an unholy compact—" gasped Howard.

"It is—it is—the curse of a broken heart is on it; yet visit it not with yours."

"Mary;" said Howard, as he rose slowly from the earth: "for me it is sufficient to know that your happiness is involved in it, be it what it may, to make me visit it with the best blessing of my heart; yet, I conjure you, weigh well your words—should you still persist in this dark tale, I cannot remain near you—I will fly you, Mary, never to look on you again—for my own sake, for yours, I will do this: to spare my very sanity, I will fly: for did I linger to see you the wife of another, the sight would bring madness with it: and for your sake, that

you may never know the wretch which my misery has made me. I will put the wide, the pathless seas between us: I will not leave one link unloosened which I can rend away—the pang at my heart from which I cannot part I will bear silently and uncomplainingly, as my last and abiding memory of the one fatal affection of my manhood; and when my pilgrimage is ended, I will not leave a trace by which my resting-place may be pointed out, lest amid the recovered happiness of the future, any reckless tongue should wound your gentle spirit, by localising your regrets for him who loved you to the last, and died with your name upon his lips."

"Do you talk to me of death, Howard?" said Mary, "you will yet stand beside my grave—would that it were even now yawning at my feet; how calmly could I stretch myself within it! But, alas, I fear me that we have yet some weary years of suffering to endure, ere we can be at rest. We are both young, and

life is long-enduring in its spring—you, at least, are free; you can sorrow in secret—you will not be required to mock your anguish with smiles, and to lead a life of ever-renewed trial —my heart will surely break the first, nor should you envy me this poor privilege——and now let us part, Howard,—part for life—for ever—you have said well; for both our sakes it must be thus—even now we are to blame, for am I not vowed to another?" And a shudder passed over the frame of Miss Marden, which sent a chill to the very heart of Howard: "Am I not at this moment a wife in the eye of heaven? Howard, farewell, and may the blessing of a blighted and a breaking heart—"

"Turn to a curse upon the soul of a seducer —a mental adulterer—a plotting hypocrite!—" shouted Daubigny, who ever seemed to spring from the earth like an evil spirit, whenever his presence was most unwelcome and unlooked for: starting as he spoke from behind the concealment of a clump of flowering shrubs, whose

scattered blossoms fell in showers to the earth from the violence with which he forced his passage through their tangled boughs: "surely I must have turned stoic to bear so much—but I trust not my affianced wife to such a leave-taking—No, no—we will have no touching palms, nor lips, young sir"— and the intensity of his passion almost choaked him as he violently seized the arm of Mary, and laughed fiercely with an expression of friend-like triumph: "your race of falsehood is now run, madam—did I not tell you that I was no easy dupe? I trusted to no father's tale of chamber solitude! nay, sir, no threatening looks—you are safe *now*—quite safe; I war not with boys nor women; the day may come indeed—but now your cloth protects you."

"Cowardly ruffian!" retorted Howard transported beyond himself: "I disclaim that cloth—I seek no safeguard from the wretch who can wrong a woman"

"Wrong said you? wrong?" echoed Dau-

bigny; "what know you of me or of my deeds? Is this your work, madam?"

"No, no—" sobbed the terrified girl as she sank upon her knees: "indeed, indeed, I have not breathed a syllable."

An expression of unutterable relief overspread for an instant the countenance of Daubigny. "It is meet, sir," he said, again turning towards Howard: "that you retract your words—"

"Never—" was the unmoved reply.

"Then by Heaven! I will force them down your dastard throat—" cried Daubigny, as he sprang towards him.

With the rapidity of lightning, Mary had flung herself between them.

"For Heaven's sake for mine!"— she shrieked wildly.

"You are right—" said Reginald as he grasped her hand, and retired a pace or two: "this is neither the fitting time nor placeto first appeal, madam, your minion may obey—it

will become his calling—your second it shall be my office to answer—Cæsar's wife must not even be suspected—and the tale would tell but badly:—but it is time this scene were ended—you and I may not meet again for years, sir—I hope we shall not; yet you will have a secure place in my memory—beware how you venture to refresh it—I am ready to protect you to your home, Miss Marden."

"Think you that I will stand tamely by, and see that lady made the slave of force?" exclaimed Howard; "unhand her, sir—either she goes willingly, or she stirs not hence."

"The lady is a free agent—" said Daubigny, drawing back with one of his most subtle looks: "decide, madam, between us—you know the penalty."

"Howard—" murmured Mary hoarsely: "leave me, I beseech you; and, for my sake, nurse no thought of violence—remember—you would pursue my—husband—"

"You shall be obeyed," said Howard, as he

bent on her a long, fixed look of despairing anguish; "for your sake, I will promise even this."

And the sarcastic laughter of Daubigny, though it brought the blood to his brow in volumes, failed to elicit a retort.

"I await your commands, Miss Marden—" said Daubigny sternly; and the trembling victim, placing her cold hand in his, without another glance towards him whom she had loved and lost, obeyed like a chidden child; and for the first time she recoiled not as she felt the arm of Reginald encircle her; for she was conscious that without his support, hateful as it was, she had not possessed the strength requisite to enable her to reach the house.

CHAPTER VI.

Morning broke: cold, and grey, and sunless; stealing over the sky slowly and chillingly, and presaging a day of gloom; and, as it penetrated into the depths of the Rosery, it fell upon the form of Howard, who still lay stretched beneath the tall tulip tree; his head was uncovered, and his hair was dank with the night dew; there was a deep hectic on his usually pale cheek, and a wild light in his eye, which bore fearful witness to the storminess of the emotions

amid which he had passed the night. As the dawn deepened, he raised himself upon his elbow, and stared coldly and searchingly about him; after awhile he rose, and, advancing to the spot where he had closed with Daubigny, and where the interposition of Mary had separated them, he looked long and earnestly upon the trampled grass which had not yet recovered its elasticity; and then raising his head, by a painful effort, his eye followed the path by which she had disappeared. And this was all; no gesture of desperation—no act of impotent violence followed that long look; but slowly resuming his hat, he walked forth into the open park.

Perhaps, to the unhappy, there is not a more wretched hour than that of dawn; Nature herself seems to pause, as if unable to resume her dominion over the yet slumbering world; all is sad and silent: the birds sleep among the boughs; the flowers droop their dew-charged heads; the very leaves are still, save when they

sigh under a passing wind; the voice of man is hushed; and the lofty hills yet wear their mysterious panoply of clouds. To Howard, however, morning dawn, or noontide brightness, had been alike indifferent: he was scarcely conscious of his own actions: his spirit was bruised within him; the one heart-spring of his existence had ceased to flow—his struggles for many hours had been intense, but the conflict was now over; a deep settled despair had taken possession of him; and he walked forward like one in a dream. The dews of night had fallen innoxiously upon him; he was beyond mere corporeal suffering: how truly has it been said that where the mind is at rest, the frame is delicate; for how commonly do the miserable escape a thousand bodily ailments which would have prostrated their more happy fellow creatures!

From the park, Howard wandered into the church-yard; it was a thickly-peopled space, the aged and the young, the wife and the maiden,

the mother, and she who had never pressed an infant to her bosom, the strong man and the stripling, all lay there, side by side, in peace. Howard paused, and looked around him; the birds were commencing their matin song, and one long line of sunshine, faint, but still beautiful, streamed upon the gray towers of the modest church; and soon it flickered upon the ivy which canopied the chancel-roof, and touched the tops of the dark yew-trees in front of the porch. The eye of the young pastor involuntarily followed it in its progress, and he started as a dark and murky cloud, heavy with rain, obscured almost instantaneously the welcome brightness. "It is the type of my own fortunes—" he murmured to himself, as he diverged from the path, and wandered across the damp and dewy grass which waved over the dead. Howard paused awhile beside every grave whose inmate he had himself consigned to the dust, and he thought almost with envy of the quiet rest of which they were there partakers; and then,

as the morning advanced, he passed the low gate of the village cemetry, and bent his steps to the cottage of the sexton and his paralytic wife.

The old man was busied in household cares, and lifted his eyes in wonder, as the pale and haggard minister stood before him.

"Nothing terrible has happened, I hope, sir—" he faultered out.

"Nothing, Simpson;" replied the curate in an accent of perfect calmness; "I have been strolling through the church-yard, and I perceive that many of the graves are much overgrown with grass and nettles—I wish you would look to this, as I would fain leave my parish as creditably as I may have power to do—and—"

"Leave the parish, sir?" screamed the old woman from her bed; "and who will ever do by the poor and the sick as you have done? woe is me! who will ever pray beside me and talk to me, as your reverence has done, blessed saint that you are! and I unable to crawl to my church."

"My successor will do as much for you cheerfully, Esther; doubt not," replied the young clergyman; "and, meanwhile, I will settle upon Simpson and yourself a small annuity, that you may never suffer want—but look well to the church-yard, my good fellow," he added with a sudden wildness of expression, "or I shall be haunted by the sighing of that rank grass among the graves."

"Heaven bless and prosper you, sir, wherever you may go!" exclaimed the old woman energetically, whom, as is common among her class, the idea of the annuity had instantly reconciled to the intended departure of Howard: "and who knows but the blessing of the bed-ridden cripple may one day be visited upon you, gentleman as you are!"

"The blessings of the poor are most precious to me;" said the young curate moving to the door; "farewell, Esther"—and extending his hand to the less voluble husband, who reverently withdrew his hat as he grasped it, Howard once more passed into the open air.

In like manner, the much-enduring young man visited all his sick parishioners, and spoke comfort to the suffering, while the iron was in his own heart: every where he was followed by blessings, in many instances by tears; but he pursued his course resolutely; and having lingered for an hour in converse with the matronly mistress of the Sunday school, he finally bent his steps towards the Ivy Lodge.

The rustic cottage so called, had, as its name implies, once served as a residence for a gate-keeper of Marden Park; but when the excesses of the late Squire entailed comparative poverty on the present one, this avenue to the house had been closed; and although the widow Martha, and her infant daughter still retained their home, their office had become a sinecure.

The widow was an individual of no small importance in the eyes of the domestics at the Hall, for she had been the foster-mother of Miss Marden; nor was her pretty daughter a person of less consideration, the more especially as she was

destined, when a few years older, to become the waiting-maid of her foster-sister. Thus the table of the servant's hall was always open to the Wilsons; whose popularity increased tenfold, when it was discovered that Martha, as she increased in years, became a walking chronicle of all the traditionary lore of the Marden family. Not a circumstance with which the name was connected but became, after a time, as familiar to her as her Bible; she had the genealogical tree by heart, and, assuredly, no tale ever lost by the telling of Martha. She would sit for hours beside the sick and the aged, and it was seldom that she failed to add something, however trifling, to her legendary lore; and by combining, inferring, and deducing, Martha had at length become as circumstantially minute as any black-letter volume of monkish miracles.

Connected as she was, though humbly, with the family at the Hall, Widow Wilson could not fail to become an especial favorite with Howard;

and often had he spent an hour in her pretty ivy-covered cottage, listening to her wild tales, and watching her unceasing wheel, while her quiet daughter glided silently about the cottage, on household cares intent, and absorbed for the hundredth time in her mother's narration; who, flattered by the attention which she excited in such a listener, put forth her best energies to repay it; and the meek Susan not unfrequently paused in her occupation, to catch some feature of the tale to which her ear was unaccustomed.

Howard was now about to visit the Ivy Lodge for the last time, and even this reflection, unimportant as it may appear to others, brought with it its own pang. Mary had hung upon the humble bosom of that meek woman, and looked laughingly into her fond eyes, and for her sake the Ivy Lodge and its inmates were dear to him. With an unsteady hand he threw back the rustic gate, and entered the small but well-kept garden of Martha; the perfume of the wall-flower, the white stock, the

cabbage-rose, and other common but fragrant blossoms, was sweet upon the air; and the one cow of the widow was luxuriously chewing the cud in its open shed. All around was peace; and Howard felt, as he traversed the narrow path, the insufficiency of wealth to purchase a tranquillity like this.

"I am come to breakfast with you, Martha;" he said, when he had replied to her astonished greeting; "I have made my last visit here, in order that it might also be my longest, for I am about to leave Marden."

"To leave Marden!" exclaimed the widow, whose hospitality yielded for the moment to her surprise; "surely, sir, you must be jesting."

"Do I look like one in sport, Martha?" asked Howard, with a smile which was almost bitter.

"No, in good truth;" said the old woman, as she gazed earnestly at him; "you have rather the look of one in sorrow, which may

Heaven avert! And so you are really going to leave us, Mr. Howard—who will ever supply your place at Marden?"

"A happier and a better man, I trust, Martha;" replied the young curate; "riches and troubles have come upon me together, and I could no longer give an undivided heart to my duties."

"Lack-a-day!" said the poor widow, unconsciously uttering, if not the exact words, at least the sentiment of a wiser brain: "what dreams our life is made of! And mine for you are at an end then—for I had formed a sort of dream about you, sir; not more for your own sake than for that of my foster-daughter, Miss Mary—and, Heaven bless her, sweet lady—when I remember that she is, to human eyes at least, the last of her race, I only wish my dreams had come to pass, were it only to avert the prophecy."

"What prophecy, good Martha?" asked Howard, involuntarily interested in every thing

which bore the slightest reference to Miss Marden: "I never heard you even hint at such a thing."

"I never did, sir, I never did, for I was afraid of scaring you from my purpose—and to avoid naming the prophecy, I never told you perhaps the grandest tale connected with Marden, where a king came wooing in the olden time, and went away without his mistress."

"I have heard the legend of the Rosery, Martha, for I can detect your allusion; but how is this prophecy, at which you hint, connected with the tale of the Lady Barbara?"

"Simply enough, sir;" said Widow Wilson with a mysterious air; "as you will allow when you have heard it; and as you are now rich, and, worse still, going to leave us, so that I have no longer any hopes of your marrying my blessed foster-child, I don't mind telling it, for it can no longer affect you—the Lady Barbara (you see that you are right in your guess, sir,) is indeed concerned in it, for she brought the

first part to pass; *who* will be appointed to fulfil the second is yet in the hands of Providence."

Had Howard been happy, he would perhaps have smiled at the solemnity of Martha's manner, but now he felt strangely affected by it; and again urged her to impart to him the purport of the prophecy.

"Listen then,"—said the oracular Mrs. Wilson:—

> "'When the first false heart wooes at Marden Hall,
> A dame shall rise, and a king shall fall;
> When a fairer than she by a lie is won,
> A deed of blood shall be dared and done.'"

"By a lie is won—" repeated Howard unconsciously, as he lifted his eyes to the countenance of old Martha.

"To be sure, I cannot but say;" rejoined the widow apologetically; misinterpreting, as it was simple enough that she should do, the echo of her own words: "I cannot but say that the verse might have been more polite

and civil, as it were, than to name such a word quite so plainly; but, I believe, that in the old times——"

"*Can* she have been won by a lie?" broke in Howard once more: "by all that is honest, it looked not unlike it." And he began to traverse the cottage floor at a pace which threatened the dislocation of his hostess's moveables.

Martha and her daughter looked on in wonder; and, as the matron afterwards remarked to her favourite gossip, "Susan and she soon saw the truth of the old saying that 'easy-got money turns a man's brain;' for, to be sure, poor Mr. Howard was for all the world like one beside himself, sweet young gentleman!"

But Howard, notwithstanding this after-decision, soon recovered his self-possession; and, with a forced smile, compelled himself to partake of the hospitality which he had craved on his arrival at the cottage; yet still the Marden

prophecy rang in his ears—the first portion had been accomplished, wherefore then should not the second? Had Howard been capable of exercising his usually dispassionate judgment, he would have easily discovered and admitted the possibility that the distich had been fitted to the fact, rather than that the fact had wrought out the distich; but he was in no mood for logic, and rather clung to the dark mysterious feeling which connected itself with a received and fearful prophecy. That morbid mood of mind which is by no means uncommon to the unhappy, prevented even a wish to elicit the truth. Mary had voluntarily left him, and that too under the protection of one by whom he had been wronged and insulted; and whose unmeasured language, even now, as he dwelt upon it, flushed his pale cheek to crimson. That she had herself stated her withdrawal to be compulsatory, he remembered; but she had not deigned to trust him further; she had not told him how she was fettered, nor by whom;

and thus he was no longer free to act; one thing, therefore, only remained to be done: to rest coldly at Marden near the woman whom he had loved, and the man by whom he had been injured, was alike impossible; he could not again venture to approach the Hall, for he knew that its roof sheltered her, and she had bade him a final adieu:—He would write his farewell to Mr. Marden—he would leave a locality pregnant with bitter and with regretful thoughts, and he would seek to recover among strangers some portion of that peace of mind which had deserted him when he was surrounded by dearer and more accustomed faces.

Bidding Martha a kind and a long adieu, and leaving both with herself and her daughter more substantial proofs of his interest in their welfare, Howard left the Ivy Lodge, and entered his own humble home.

He looked around him, but every thing seemed changed;—and yet all, save his own heart, was as it had ever been With a des-

perate effort he seated himself at his desk, and prepared to take his last leave of the master of Marden. For awhile he remained pillowing his head upon his hand, while visions of the old Hall, and of her whose gentleness had made it to him a paradise—of the smiles on which he had hung—the glances which he had met—the low voice to which he had listened—came back upon him with a vitality and distinctness which rendered him incapable of exertion; but as memory slowly progressed, and at length dwelt on the closing scene in the Rosery, then indeed the blood once more coursed rapidly through his veins, and it was almost with eagerness that he seized the pen which lay beside him.

"Business, which even my new-fangled and worthless wealth cannot defer:"—thus he wrote—"reasons, which even my friendship and gratitude towards yourself cannot remove, obliged me to leave Marden suddenly, so suddenly indeed, that I am altogether unable to take

my leave in person; or to tender to you, as I could have wished, my assurances of unfailing esteem, respect and affection. And you will not regret this—I am in no mood to encounter the trial; nor should I be willing to subject to it one whom I so much value. I need scarcely commend to your good offices the poorer of my parishioners, for your protection is already extended to all. I have ventured to provide in some degree for their mere worldly wants; but I have done it humbly, satisfied as I am that if they possess not peace of spirit, the purple and fine linen of the earth will avail them nothing. I do not affect to address you in a strain of light-hearted insensibility, for from one who sees his household gods shivered around him, and who is about to become a wanderer in strange lands, such a strain were indeed idle; neither do I seek to excite your sympathy—be happy, and forget me; so happy, that, surrounded by those who

love you, you may never regret your transient association with the wretched

HOWARD."

This painful task ended, the unhappy young man, shut into his apartment, silently revolved a thousand plans, each more wild and visionary than the last, and abandoned every one as it suggested itself, with a sigh of despairing wretchedness. Thus time wore on, and at length came the shadowy twilight amid whose gloom a solitary coach passed through the village on its way to London; the sound of its shrill horn disjointedly shrieking forth the appropriate air of "Over the hills, and far away," aroused Howard from his solitary musings; and hastily leaving the cottage where he had nursed so many hopes, and which he now quitted in despair of heart, he bent his steps to the Marden Arms.

Strange! how the common every day occurrences of life jar on the sensitive nerves of the suffering; the busy ostlers were immersing

the heads of the reeking horses in the clear cool water of the village-brook; the urchins, just freed from a neighbouring school, were standing round the vehicle in busy idleness; two or three old crones were peering over their half-doors at the outside passengers, and speculating on the contents and destination of sundry packages and parcels, which mine host was, with much parade, adding to the sum total of peripatetic property already accumulated by the "Nelson" on its passage; while groupes of old men, wearied by their short day's labour, were putting, and replying to questions, with a rapidity which was rendered requisite by the short space of time that the coach tarried in the village. This scene was, as Howard well knew, enacted every evening; the arrival of the Nelson was, in short, the one diurnal event at Marden; and yet, on the present occasion, he felt as though the bustle, and the loquacity, and the crowd, were peculiarly irritating and oppressive; but he shrank

still more, when on perceiving him, the villagers withdrew their hats, and respectfully blessed him as he passed; while the guard, obeying the gesture of his out-stretched finger, let down the steps with a loud clang, and as he closed the door after this new passenger, vociferated to the coachman in his most elevated key — "One inside, no luggage." In another instant the horse-cloths were withdrawn—the "All's right" of the same functionary pealed out; and when the driver had coquetted for awhile with a somewhat refractory wheeler, in order to excite the admiration and astonishment of the villagers, the Nelson was once more fairly in motion; and Howard was conscious that he was indeed rapidly leaving behind him all that he yet loved on earth—the peaceful locality which had been endeared to him by friendship — and the gentle being whose image was engraven upon his heart in undying characters.

CHAPTER VII.

"ARE are you *quite* sure that you shall be a willing bride, dear Mary?" asked Miss Daubigny, as she sat beside her friend in the sunny morning room at Marden, of which mention has already been made: and there was a slight shade of doubt in the affectionate tone of her voice as she put the question; "are you perfectly certain that Reginald is your heart's choice?"

"Am I not about to marry him, Honoria?"

asked Mary in reply: "why then should you doubt it?"

"I know not—indeed I can have no right to do so—yet it strikes me that yours is but a sad courtship; you sigh and weep Reginald frowns and fumes—now you are ill—now he is angry—and above all, you are so cautious never to indulge him with that in which most love-lorn ladies so delight—a *téte à téte*—you are really a woman after Sir Charles Grandison's own heart—pretty, and proper, and precise, to a pin's point."

"And yourself, dear Honoria?"

"I? oh, my adventure progresses altogether differently—in the first place, we sometimes quarrel, which you never do—then we have a very tender reconciliation, almost enough to induce one to quarrel again—which you have no opportunity of doing—and now and then, by the merest chance in the world, we happen to meet in the conservatory, or the library, or the grounds; and we do not always on such occa-

sions, hurry ourselves very remarkably to rejoin the family party. All this is very sad, you will say; but I do assure you, sweet sister of mine that is to be, that in nine cases out of ten, I am wholly guiltless, and the fault rests entirely with Willoughby."

"Happy Honoria!" sighed Mary involuntarily.

"There *is* some mystery attached to your engagement with my brother; I am sure there is," said Miss Daubigny, as she raised her large searching eyes anxiously to the face of her companion: "do not be rash, Mary: remember that this is the most serious venture of your whole life—for your own sake, do not marry Reginald if you can give him only a divided heart—he is too proud to endure coldness; you cannot yet know him, if you really contemplate so rash a step."

"Honoria, dear Honoria;" interposed Mary: "I will not, I cannot, deny to your affection the avowal that there is a mystery—but more than

there is a mystery, but more than this you must not seek to know—I am your brother's affianced wife: I am bound to respect the secret which he wishes to preserve inviolate; and I will at least do my duty; nor is it in your high and noble nature to wish me to act otherwise."

"But your happiness, dear Mary?"

"Is gone for ever, Honoria; look at my cheek and eye: the struggle is indeed past, but the traces are yet there."

"This must not be!" exclaimed Miss Daubigny, starting from her seat with flashing eyes: "you are too good, too gentle to be so sacrificed—I will expostulate with Reginald—I will point out to him the enormity of compelling you by his importunities to become his victim."

"Draw not down upon your own head, dear, generous girl, the weight of his displeasure;" said Mary, her own pale cheek flushing for an instant: "I have laid bare my heart to you in fearless trust, for you will not, I know you will not, by betraying my confidence, double my

wretchedness—and believe me, Honoria, the task were at best an idle one which you would entail upon yourself—your brother is not deceived—he knows *all* my anguish, my misery, my tears—"

"Is he then quite a fiend?" murmured Miss Daubigny, as she moved to the window: "what can this mean?" but though she stood long unconsciously looking out upon the fair scene which was spread before her, and buried in thought, the mystery remained still unfathomed.

"I must endeavour to content myself:" she said after a pause, once more rejoining her friend; "and yet it is no light task to look upon your wretchedness in silence, Mary; surely one breaking heart might have sufficed beneath the same roof!"

"Breathe no syllable of this to your mother, Honoria;" urged Miss Marden earnestly: "it is no fit tale for her ears—and you shall see how I will smile when she is by—I smile now some-

times — and my poor father is cheated into the belief that I am happy! But you came hither to talk of yourself — of Bransdon—of your approaching marriage — speak on then, dear Honoria; I shall be a delighted listener."

"I have no heart for the tale now—I am sick — sad — disgusted with the world — in a mood to quarrel with Willoughby himself."

"Not so;" said Mary, striving at composure: "happiness, and those who confer it, are far too precious to be sacrificed even for a moment to a passing phantasy:—we estimate every thing the most justly when it is lost to us; the poor man looks upon the gilded coach, and envies the withered and shivering invalid to whom its downy cushions are a bed of thorns; he does not suffer his thoughts to rest amid his repinings on the agonies of the wretch whose gold he covets; yet in truth, he dwells not, despite his deprivations, half so bitterly on its want, as would that very victim of disease and

heart-burning, were the trappings of luxury torn from the poor frame which has scarce power left to estimate them—it is even thus with you and me, Honoria: though I smiled as I trod my allotted path, I never felt its blessedness till it was past; now I look back in wonder at my own supineness; and think that were that path to tread again—but this is idle, and I do but weary you."

"It is rather yourself whom you weary, love;" said Miss Daubigny affectionately; "and therefore, to spare you further exertion, I will tell my tale." And seating herself beside Mary, she encircled her waist fondly with her arm, and drew the pale cheek of the sufferer to her bosom: "Bransdon, as you know, has long borne patiently with my—I fear I must admit it—unpardonable procrastination; but I shrank from a separation which would, I know, to my poor mother be a most painful one: now, however, that he has learnt her prospect of gaining a second daughter, as fond, and far more gentle

than his own impetuous mistress, he has become most unaccommodatingly urgent; and I believe that I have in some degree yielded to the cogency of his reasonings — therefore, Mary; why what a silly tale is this to tell! I can scarcely bring myself to such poor and incurious detail—in short, Mary, we are to be married next week—and away, away, I scarcely know whither, on the very wings of the wind."

"So soon—" apostrophised Miss Marden.

"Is it not childish?" retorted Honoria, with a happy smile.

Mary only replied by pressing her lips to the glowing cheek which was bent towards her.

"Is it not monstrous to be deluded into allowing one-self to be married by such an anti-sentimental old mutterer, as poor toothless Mr. Mannington? The rather too, that, had I relented but two months ago, the handsome Howard would have reconciled even me to matrimony, by his graceful method of rivetting its fetters—but you are ill, Mary—agitated—"

"It is a mere spasm," said Miss Marden, mastering her emotion, but not so rapidly as to conceal from the keen eye of affection its awakening cause: "I often suffer from a sharp pang."

"I do believe you, my own gentle Mary:" murmured her companion: "but never again shall it be inflicted by my want of thought."

"Honoria!" gasped out Mary, as she raised her head, and looked towards Miss Daubigny with an enquiring eye, and a burning cheek.

"Be calm, Mary, be silent:" said the fond girl, as she drew her once more to her bosom: "there is no need of words—I see it all; and Reginald—but he is my brother, and I forbear."

Pained as the pure mind of Mary could not fail to be by the betrayal of her secret, she nevertheless felt more happy than she had done for the last two months. Honoria now knew all, and yet she did not despise her—she rather pitied her sorrow than rebuked it; had there been sin in her position (and more than once

she had been tempted in her misery to believe that there must be,) the proud and honest nature of Miss Daubigny would, she well knew, have recoiled from it at once; consequently even amid her suffering she was comforted. The two friends talked long and tenderly together, but neither by word nor look did Honoria revert to Howard; she rather dwelt on her own approaching nuptials, and arranged with Mary a thousand of those little unimportant circumstances, which render the week that precedes marriage the busiest period of a woman's life. But nothing occupied so large a share of her thoughts, nothing indeed engrossed the attention of both so utterly as the happiness of Mrs. Daubigny. How they should render the parting, which was now inevitable, as little painful to her as it was possible to make it, was the leading consideration, and that which appeared to weigh the most heavily on the mind of Honoria; she had, in fact, (trusting that her fears with regard to Mary's repugnance to an

union with her brother might prove chimerical,) cherished a hope that her friend might be, like herself, at length induced to yield to the continual entreaties of her lover, and consent to the celebration of their respective marriages on the same day: but now, when she saw her worst forebedings more than verified, she refrained from even hinting at such a wish; and only wept silent tears at the failure of his most promising arrangement.

At this period of the conversation, Sir Willoughby Bransdon was announced; whose patience being by no means so overwhelming as his attachment, was thoroughly wearied by awaiting at The Elms, the return of his truant mistress; and the two friends, as they raised their heads to greet him, assuredly presented to his view countenances which were any thing but in unison with his own feelings.

"Why, what means this?" asked the light-hearted Baronet, as he extended a hand to each: "I fully expected to find you immersed

in smiles and white ribbon, and I see you on the contrary, 'like Niobe, all tears'—I shall give Reginald a hint of this, or we may one day find our pretty brides transformed into a twin streamlet — after the mythological fashion— come, come, fair ladies, this is using us cruelly, and we are bound to protect ourselves from such peril—"

"We have at all events not been weeping for either of you," said Honoria, whose sunny smile as she looked towards him, seemed to turn her very tears to happiness: "we have been mourning for our dear selves, and for those who will have to sustain a separation from us; and having, as in duty bound, given a tear to each, we have necessarily consumed no inconsiderable portion of our valuable time in paying this parting tribute—you, who are more graceless by nature, never fulfil these lachrymose offices of kindness."

Poor Mary! how, as she looked and listened, did she feel the bitterness of her own destiny

And yet, for one proof of consideration at least did she feel grateful to Daubigny! never once had he alluded to the fearful scene in the Rosery; never once, when in spite of her incessant watchfulness to prevent it, they had chanced to be for a moment alone together, had he breathed to her the name of Howard. Equally with herself did he appear to shun all allusion to the past; and although at times he reproachfully chid her tears, she could not but confess to her own heart that he had borne far more patiently with her avoidance and her melancholy than she had dared to hope from the uncompromising violence of his nature.

But Mary was yet a stranger to the actual character of Daubigny; she had seen him under circumstances of strong excitement, under the influence of an absorbing and reckless passion, and in moments where the natural subtlety and caution of his spirit were borne down by one overwhelming mental avalanche. Once comparatively secure of success, Daubigny resumed

his ordinary cold imperiousness of manner; to Mary, however, he was gentle, forbearing, and tender—but it was the gentleness, the forbearance, and the tenderness, which trusted not one turn to fate—the patient docility of the adroit angler who indulges every evolution of his destined victim. The spirit of Daubigny was not one to be prostrated, thwarted, and agonized, as it had been during his pursuit of Mary, without working out its revenge; love indeed, yet lingered about his heart, but it was not the love which it had once been; it was blended with bitter memories—clouded by a care known only to himself, and poisoned by an undying jealousy—all this was yet to be repaid; and Daubigny, like the Campbell of old, only lamented that he must 'bide his time:' would that time ever come? the future was in the hands of fate.

The days sped on; and the marriage morning of Miss Daubigny at length arrived; at an early hour Mr. Marden and his daughter joined

the party at The Elms, which consisted only of the brother of Sir Willoughby Bransdon, and the respective families of Marden and Daubigny; and while Mary was busied in the apartment of her friend, and Mrs. Daubigny was weeping silently apart at the inevitable deprivation, to which she was called on to submit, Reginald drew Mr. Marden into the deep recess of a bay window with a gesture of supplicatory earnestness.

"I have hitherto forborne to weary you with complaints, my dear sir:" he said gravely, "but this is really a trial with which I am scarcely able to contend. You are aware of Mary's voluntary promise to be mine; and yet, can you be insensible to the harassing and heart-breaking perseverance with which she eludes all mention of the actual period when she will become so? Surely I need not expatiate on the sincerity, the devotedness of my affection; and yet I find myself compelled to entreat your interest with your daughter in my behalf.

Think you that every triumphant smile which I detect on the lip of Bransdon does not wound me to the very soul? In short, my good sir, I am not adamant; my forbearance is exhausted; and the very love which I bear to Mary has become a misery to me."

"Pooh! pooh!" laughed the old gentleman; "mere rhodomontade—the very wish to do as we see others do—why, my dear fellow, your turn will soon come—do not be ungenerous enough to envy your neighbour. However, I will talk to Mary, and I will say all the pretty things with which my memory or my imagination will supply me—but I do not think she has been in her usual placid spirits of late; she sighs frequently, and once or twice I have actually detected her in tears."

"A still stronger argument in my favour;" urged Daubigny; "it shall be my task to dry those tears; tenderness will do much, and I do not of despair bringing back a bright smile to the lip of your gentle Mary."

"She is the one pet lamb;" said the old gentleman, with a moisture in his own eyes, as he affectionately grasped the hand of Daubigny, "but she will be safe with you; and the sooner the better, for these weddings are but sad festivals at the best."

The conversation was terminated by the entrance of the bride, and her attendant, but Daubigny felt that he had gained his point, and he turned smilingly to greet them. The Baronet had already possessed himself of Honoria's hand, and was leading her towards her mother; and Reginald, as he approached to greet his own mistress, felt his heart beat high as he looked upon her. Never, perhaps, did two really beautiful women present so strong a contrast: the cheek and brow of Honoria burnt painfully beneath the gaze of the party; and, from the very consciousness that it was so, she assumed an air of even more than ordinary haughtiness; while Mary, timid, trembling, and tearful, followed closely on her steps, as

pallid as the veil which hung over her brow. The one was as the imperial lily, looking down in her proud beauty, as though she felt that every eye was upon her: the other as the sweet white violet, blooming modestly at her side. The struggle at the heart of Mary was fearful, as she knelt near Honoria at the humble altar of Marden church; but her very tears were stayed, as she listened to the deep and painful breathing of Daubigny; and when Bransdon rose from his knees, and turned smilingly and exultingly towards his young wife, Mary felt her spirit quail beneath the expression of Reginald.

"When, Mary," he asked hoarsely as he led her along the aisle; "when is my trial to end? when am I to be released from an existence of alternate hope and disappointment which is becoming hateful to me?"

"We will talk of this hereafter;" murmured Mary, whom the very locality had unfitted for such a discussion.

"No, Mary: now, now, you shall answer

me—have I not suffered for two entire months uncomplainingly? are you, in truth, fooling me? daring me to extremity?—See," he continued, as he marked the terror which he had excited: "three more paces, and we reach the porch—you shall not pass it thus—when will you be mine? I will give you another month, Mary—an entire month—do you consent to this?"

Miss Marden stole one hurried glance at her imperious lover, and she hesitated no longer; Daubigny bent his head to catch her reply, at the very instant when they were about to pass the portal; and with his own hand he folded the long veil of his victim more closely about her, as the faint "I do—" of a stricken and submissive spirit passed her quivering lips.

What is time? can it indeed be that it progresses ever at the same pace? that its action is defined, its periods accurate? Does it not rather linger beside the sick bed, delay with the desperate and the dying, and weave its minutes into hours beneath the watching of the

sanguine? And, to regain its wonted regularity, does it not fly before the agony of the fearful, and steal softly and swiftly from the grasp of the happy and the blessed? Alas! the fancy is indwelling with ourselves: day and night pause not in their course—weeks and months speed on, reckless alike of human cares and of human wishes, and be it for good or evil, it varies not its volition.

A month! an *entire* month! thus had Daubigny worded the period of her reprieve; and Mary felt as though she had yet breathing space. She had whispered her promise as she hung in the parting embrace of the happy Honoria, and a silent kiss had repaid the confidence; she had compelled herself to communicate it to her father; and the unsuspicious and sanguine old man, had only replied by the half-reproachful question of: "What, a whole month, Mary?" And yet, ere she had seemed to have recovered from the shock of her own promise, the month was past!

The eve of her marriage day had arrived; Mrs. Daubigny had, since the departure of Lady Bransdon, been on a visit at the Hall, and Mary stole softly from the presence of her father and her friend to indulge awhile in her own thoughts; if to suffer them to feed on misery may indeed be termed indulgence. Reginald was absent; a wild excitement had grown upon him as the day of his union with Mary became more near, and he had devised a thousand schemes of employment, connected with his situation, which sufficed to absorb the greater portion of his time. A mind less preoccupied than that of Miss Marden could not have failed to feel the inconsistency of his manner; but, grateful for his absence, by whatever cause produced, she only breathed a silent prayer that such might ever be the case.

The casement of her chambers was thrown back, but although autumn had almost yielded its reign to winter, Mary was unconscious of the chill of the evening air. The stillness was

profound, and the moon-light lay cold and silvery far along the grass; she involuntarily turned her eyes in the direction of the Rosery—there all was gloom—and she leant listlessly in her high-backed chair, thinking of all that might have been, and all that was, until the gray dawn stole in upon her painful reverie.

High rose the sun in the bright heavens, but the pale girl heeded it not; her gaze was earnestly rivetted on a dress of rich white lace which was ostentatiously spread out before her, and on the inlaid casket which lay beside it, containing the costly necklace of the Lady Barbara; a wreath of fair white roses were near the casket, and the long veil which she had worn so lately at another and a happier bridal, was also beneath her eye. What a mockery did it seem! Mary shuddered as she remembered that the victim must indeed be arrayed for the sacrifice, but she did not weep; the time of tears was over, and she only sighed to think how comparatively easy it would have been to die!

At an early hour the gentle Susan Wilson, whose envied duties commenced on her foster-sister's bridal-day, craved admission to her apartment; and the astonished girl started, as she looked upon the pale cheek and troubled eye which met her respectful salutation.

"Not a word:—Susan, not a word," murmured Mary hurriedly; "I have not slept, I could not sleep—commence your duties therefore rather by creating some dis-array in the apartment—till then not a word, Susan—when there is little, very little time to spare, tell me so, I shall be ready then."

The bewildered girl obeyed in silence, but she stole many an anxious glance at the bowed-down head and pale cheek of her beautiful foster-sister, and thought how very differently her fancy had pourtrayed a bride upon her marriage morning, and then she ransacked her memory for some Marden tradition which might bear upon the case of her fair young mistress; but she sought in vain, for, although

old Martha had many a tale of stern knights and frowning cavaliers, she had ever talked of 'bright ladies' and 'happy brides;' thus, then Susan, in her simplicity, could devise no plausible reason for the evident unhappiness of her young lady, and her wonder soon faded into sympathy.

Miss Marden started at the second summons of her meek attendant, and merely murmuring "Is it indeed so late!" she passively submitted herself to the busy hands of Susan. When all was finished—the glittering jewel clasped upon her neck, the white roses wreathed in her long dark hair, the snowy veil thrown across her forehead—then, for the first time, Mary glanced at the large mirror before which she sat; and to her dying day, Susan remembered the despairing smile with which she turned away, murmuring to herself, "It cannot last long—there is yet hope for me—a broken heart makes a pale bride!"

THE MARDENS.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

Sixteen years after the events just recorded, a tall, thin, melancholy-looking man, apparently between forty and fifty years of age, his hair slightly touched with gray, and his brow bearing the impress of deep and saddened thought, alighted from his travelling-carriage at the principal inn of the assize town of ——. He gave a few hurried orders to his valet, and then shut himself into his apartment. From the servant no tidings could be gathered of the identity of his master; he was evidently averse

to communicate the slightest circumstance relative either to that master, or to himself. Great, consequently, was the desire of landlord, landlady, chamber-maids, and waiters, to learn all which they could collect both of the traveller and his attendant, the more especially as so splendid an equipage had not been seen in that quiet little town for years.

Mine host was therefore proportionably gratified when, just as twilight was beginning to gloom through the apartment, he was summoned to the presence of the stranger. With a profusion of bows, each one more obsequious than the last, the worthy landlord closed the door behind him, and stood within ten paces of his distinguished-looking inmate.

"I have not visited your neighbourhood for some years," said a deep voice which sounded strangely familiar to the listener; "doubtlessly many changes have taken place, and there are a few individuals for whom I am anxious to enquire."

The pause was filled up by the ready bow of the landlord.

"The Forresters of Fearnhurst"—said the stranger, as though compelling himself to continue the conversation, "are they yet in existence? is the old place still kept up?"

"But badly, sir; Sir Gregory has been dead these ten years, and the young baronet is abroad. My Lady has never seen any company since she was left a widow, more's the pity for the neighbourhood; the poor, indeed, have reason to bless her, for she spends many an hour in their cottages: but the gentry are never admitted beyond the hall-doors of Fearnhurst now."

"And the Willoughbys ——?"

"Worse, and worse, sir; Miss Florence is in a mad-house, and the squire broke his heart, poor gentleman!"

There was a momentary silence, for the cold and almost stern manner of the stranger checked the natural loquacity of the host; still,

it struck the worthy inn-keeper, that although he had not been able to furnish by any means a favourable account of either of the families for whom enquiry had been made, his intelligence did not appear to have affected his listener in proportion to its importance; on the contrary, no reply was returned to his last communication, and the stranger took two or three turns across the floor ere he again spoke; but, when he did so, there was an evident tremulousness in his tone which was palpable even to the landlord.

"Do the Mardens still reside at the Hall?"

"Ha! sir, that's the worst business of all—" said Boniface, with unaffected concern; "I suppose you know, sir, that Miss Mary married Squire Daubigny of The Elms; people wondered very much at the time, how she came to take a fancy to such a wild young gentleman—but I trust that you will not betray me; I should scarcely say so much, sir, but really, when I

begin to talk of that dear lady—God rest her soul!"

"How!" exclaimed the stranger, suddenly seizing the landlord by the arm; "her soul, said you? speak—you do not mean to tell me that Mary Marden is dead."

"Lack-a-day, sir," was the reply, "many is the long year that has rolled over the grave of Mrs. Daubigny, poor lady! they *do* say that she was somehow cheated into the marriage; but it does not become me to spread such a report, more especially as Squire Daubigny uses my house; be this as it may, however, certain it is that the poor lady broke her heart about two years after her marriage, and left a sweet little girl behind her."

Again the stranger started, and passed his hand across his brow as though struck by a sudden pang; "And the old gentleman?" he asked hoarsely.

"Aye, sir: that was a sad thing; Miss Mrden had not been long married when some

sort of a disturbance took place—I know nothing of what it arose from; but the old squire never set his foot in The Elms afterwards, and died within six months. Just before he was given over, great inquiries were made after a Mr. Howard, sir, who was once curate of Marden, and many thought would have been married to Miss Mary, for he was always at the Hall; and a fine young man he was, and as good as he was good-looking, as the poor have reason to know to this very day; but unfortunately some rich relation died in the Indies, and left him a mint of money; and away he went like a shot, after settling I don't know how much on the parish poor—well, sir, as I was saying, great inquiries were made after Mr. Howard by desire of the Squire, but nothing could be learnt except that he had gone abroad; and the poor old gentleman died without seeing him."

"And the child—the daughter?—"

"Is living with her aunt Lady Bransdon, sir, in Sussex"—

"What!" exclaimed the stranger; "has the father parted from his only child? from the daughter of his dead wife?"

The landlord looked embarrassed; "There was, I believe, a reason for that arrangement, sir; the Squire, as I was told, was very loath to suffer the child to leave him, but her ladyship insisted upon it; and she has never been at The Elms since."

The stranger asked no further question; but simply making some trivial remark relative to his dinner, bent his head slightly with the calm condescension of conscious superiority, and dismissed his companion.

"Dead!" he murmured, as he paused in the centre of the floor, "my first love and my last—Mary is dead! has been dead for years—I shall never look upon her again—never listen to her sweet voice—she sleeps the last sleep—the deep, the dreamless sleep of death—" And again he resumed his hasty stride across the apartment.

The dinner was removed untouched; and the well-taught domestic made no display of sympathy or surprise, as he withdrew the cloth, and prepared to leave the room.

"Harrison—" said his master; "let me be awakened at dawn to-morrow; and see that my horse be saddled for me when I come down."

"Am I to accompany you, sir?"

"No; I ride alone."

"Am I to look for your return at any definite time?"

"My movements are uncertain; do not leave the town therefore until you see me back; and above all, be careful not to satisfy the idle curiosity of those about you."

The man bowed and retired.

Even as he had said, at dawn, the stranger mounted his horse, and slowly rode out of the town; and the morning was yet early when he drew in his bridle at the gate of the Ivy Lodge which has been mentioned as the abode of the widow Wilson.

Pre-occupied as his thoughts still evidently were, the traveller was instantly struck by the altered appearance of the well-remembered cottage. Flowers yet bloomed about the portal, but they were less carefully trained than they had once been, and they now disputed the ground foot by foot with the encroaching weeds which grew wild and rank among them. The ever-green hedge was trampled in places, as if by the inroads of cattle; and a flock of poultry were basking in the beams of the morning sun, and burying themselves busily among the light mould of the partially cultivated garden. Portions of the ivy had been torn, or had fallen from the roof and walls of the cottage, and now lay trailing across the grass-grown path; while the last touch of discomfort was given to the exterior of the building by the substitution of rags and straw for the missing glass of the shivered casements.

With a deep sigh, as though the desolation on which he now looked brought with it asso-

ciations yet sadder, the stranger flung the bridle of his horse over a projecting branch of the majestic cedar tree which supported on one side the narrow wicket of the little garden; and, stepping over the gate which, torn from its hinges, only partially performed its allotted office, he walked rapidly along the path which led to the cottage. He struck loudly upon the door with the handle of his riding-whip, but the summons was unanswered; after the pause of a moment he renewed it, and was immediately conscious that although it elicited no reply, it was nevertheless not unheard, for he detected the sound of suppressed laughter from within; the light mirth, as it seemed, of childhood; and under the impression that it was the mere roguish love of mischief so common to infancy which detained him at the door, he lifted the latch, and entered. His foot was scarcely across the threshold when the stranger started, and an expression of pain passed over his countenance. The apartment in which he

stood was scrupulously clean, but the grasp of poverty was upon it; every article of furniture which it contained, every object either of use or ornament, (for some even of these were there!) mutilated, or faded, or decayed. Nor was the narrow room without an occupant; for, seated on a low stool before the scanty fire, and busied in carving a piece of wood into some grotesque device, sat a boy of twelve or thirteen years of age, whose attention was scarcely diverted for an instant from his employment by the entrance of the intruder; and the stranger stood for a moment earnestly observing him before he attempted to attract his notice. Coarsely but cleanly clad, the boy bore not about him a trace of the poverty which distinguished the dwelling; it was evident that neither hunger nor want had touched him; and yet the stranger felt, as his gaze rested on the calm and somewhat cunning countenance of the lad, that its expression belied his years. His face was pale to sallowness, his lips were ashy white, and but for his

bright, ever-burning eye, there would have been a death-like look about him almost supernatural; and that dark, full eye, lustrous as it was, was rather subtle than intelligent; searching than sagacious:—at the second glance you detected the presence of idiotism—the taper was there, but the light had been extinguished.

"You are busy betimes, my good lad," said the stranger soothingly, as he laid his hand lightly on the curling hair of the boy, and pointed to the wood upon which he was so industriously engaged.

"Aye, busy enough;" gibbered out the idiot, with that low chuckling laugh which so frequently characterizes the distinction between mind and matter: "making a ship for father to come back in."

"And where is your mother, my fine fellow?"

"Gone to get father's breakfast; will you

stay and have some?" and he looked up with a vacant smile at his companion.

"Will she be long away?" asked the stranger.

"Aye, aye, the way is long enough:" was the somewhat sullen reply: "that's why mother cries so; but when my ship is made, she'll do it easy."

A quick step on the narrow path terminated the dialogue, and as the stranger turned in the direction of the sound, a care-worn, middle-aged, and decent-looking woman stood before him.

"You are not Martha—" burst as it were unconsciously from his lips.

"No, indeed, sir;" replied the woman, as she dropped a courtsey, and smoothed down her coarse apron with a somewhat fluttered air; "my poor mother has been in the church-yard for years."

"And you then are Susan—"

"Yes, sir; altered as I am by care and sor-

row, and misery;" and the ready tear sprang to her eye—"I am indeed the daughter of Martha Wilson: but will you not be seated, sir? you seem ill—or weary—"

"Do you not know me, Susan?"

The woman looked earnestly on him as he withdrew his hat, and turned towards her; but she shook her head doubtingly.

"Sorrow has changed us both—" said the stranger with a bitter smile; "and yet—"

"A strange thought comes over me now I see that smile—" interrupted Susan, as she bent forward with a flushed cheek, and fastened her gaze once more upon the high pale brow of the stranger: "but no—no—it is not possible—Mr. Howard's eye had a light in it, and his brow was as smooth as marble—but I ask pardon, sir;" she added with a rising sob: "your smile was so like that of a gentleman—"

"Whom you have not yet quite forgotten, Susan;" followed up her companion as he sank into the chair which she had placed for him:

"misery has been busy with me, but nevertheless you have guessed rightly; I am indeed Henry Howard."

"Gracious Providence!" exclaimed the woman, as she threw herself on her knees before him: "then the dying wish of my angel-mistress is at last fulfilled—and I once more look upon Mr. Howard.—Oh sir,—the hand of affliction has pressed heavily upon us all—our dear young lady—blessed, broken-hearted martyr! But she is at peace now—and her dear child, sweet cherub,—she is safe with my lady Bransdon, Heaven be praised! — Times are sadly changed, sir; so many in their graves; and the rest poor or broken-hearted—I can see that you have had your cares too, Mr. Howard; rich and great as you are--and I—" and here the weeping woman turned her moistened eyes upon her idiot boy, who was still placidly and silently pursuing his employment; "I have been heavily tried, sir; but I have compelled myself to bear up through all, for the sake of my poor child."

"You have done well and wisely, Susan;" said Howard, as he kindly raised her up; "and now you must command your feelings, for I have much to ask of you; comfort yourself meanwhile with the assurance that your days of poverty are at an end, and that, while I have life, none who loved *her* shall suffer want."

Susan rose slowly from her knees, and her lips quivered as she strove to express her gratitude, but she could not utter a syllable; and the momentary silence which ensued was painfully broken by a peal of soulless laughter from the idiot boy, whom some unhoped-for success in his fanciful undertaking had aroused for an instant into mirth.

"I already knew, Susan:" said Howard hoarsely, when he had recovered from the shock of this startling interruption; "that *she* was gone—but the tale was told vaguely; and there were dark inferences, and frightful implications mingled in the history, to which I was unwilling to listen from a cold and uninterested

narrator—I came hither to learn the truth from the lips of Martha; I had forgotten that I left her an aged woman, and that I had been sixteen years an exile—nor should I marvel that the grey-headed have gone down into the grave, when the young and the beautiful—" Howard paused: he had overrated his powers of endurance: he had tasked too heavily the strength alike of his nerves and of his feelings, and he turned hastily away to conceal the emotion which he could not controul.

"And yet I scarcely think that it was the weight of years which hurried my mother to the tomb, sir;" said Susan, "every one thought that her heart was broken; and well it might be—I remember, as though it were but yesterday, how she walked out of the death chamber, with a dry eye and a pale cheek, when she had strewed the flowers over the coffin; and said that it was time for her to lie down and die in her turn, for that she had lived long enough

when she had kissed the dead brow of her foster-child."

Howard groaned.

"Oh! sir;" pursued Susan, with the garrulity common to her rank: "That was a melancholy wedding! I shall never forget Miss Mary, when I opened her chamber door, the morning that she was to be a bride! she had never laid down on her bed; but there she sat, poor lamb, by the open window; her beautiful hair dank with the night-dew, (for she had been sitting there all night, sir): and her lips as white as ashes—her bridal dress was spread out before her, but she looked at it with as much horror as if it had been a shroud. She had not shed a tear: she was too sick at heart to weep—but she seemed as though her heart was breaking; and I believe that it was! Not a hand would she raise to dress herself, though her lace and her diamonds might have been the envy of a Duchess; but sigh, sigh, sigh, all the time that I prepared her for the ceremony;

you may be sure that I did not venture to utter a word, sir; indeed I was struck dumb, as one may say, with astonishment, and I was young and timid; and thought that perhaps fine ladies did not condescend to be happy at such times like the people to whom I had been accustomed—alas for my poor young mistress, and for myself too! I have grown wiser by experience; but I shall never forget it—"

"And did she yield to her fate without a struggle?"

"Without an effort to free herself, she did, sir: but the struggle was bitter enough! I thought that her heart would have burst as she stood at the altar, with her hand in Mr. Daubigny's; and the old squire beside her, sometimes smiling, and sometimes weeping, as though he had some misgiving that all was not as it should be, and yet scarcely knowing what could be wrong; my Lady Bransdon cried outright; and the bridegroom's mother, who loved Miss Mary as though she had been her own

child, fainted in the church, and was lifted senseless into the carriage, which was but a bad omen for the young couple, my poor mother said. However, be that as it may, sir, they were married; and so miserable a day as that to which I had so long looked forward with delight, I had never then known, though I have spent even more bitter ones since. No word of complaint did my mistress ever utter to me; she was too high-minded for such weakness; but before we returned to The Elms she was the mere shadow of her former self; and Mr. Daubigny, though he never chid her for her sadness, taunted her with a sneer more terrible to a nature like her's than a thousand frowns. Never was there so gloomy a house as ours! The old lady had become a confirmed invalid, and generally kept her own room; Miss Mary, (for I still love to call her so, sir;) moved about the house like one in a dream; and it required all the affection which we felt for her to induce the servants to bear with the

violence and tyranny of Mr. Daubigny. At length the old lady died; and the shade fell deeper than ever on the brow of my poor young mistress—she withered like a lily on which a blight has rested; and even the eyes of Squire Marden, which had hitherto been so strangely blind to the change in his daughter, were opened at last. Oh! sir—it would have been better had they never been so—my young lady expected to become a mother, and Squire Daubigny persuaded him that this was the cause of his wife's depression; but the poor old gentleman misdoubted him; and one day, when he was talking to his daughter of his anxiety to embrace a child of her's ere he died, he told her more of his affairs than he had ever done before; and thinking that he should make her happy, he explained to her how much his property had improved of late years; and how much increased his means of providing for her and for her children had now become—I know all this, sir; for my lady's health had by this time become so

feeble that I never left her, and the Squire knew that I had inherited my mother's love for his family, as well as that I doated on my mistress; and therefore he did not hesitate to speak before me. I shall never forget my lady's look as he went on explaining one thing after another—she almost gasped for breath—she had not spoken for some time, and when she did at length attempt to articulate, the effort was frightful: she raised her pale face from the pillow, (for she was leaning in the large chair in her dressing-room,) and, looking earnestly in the face of the poor old gentleman, she whispered out slowly and shrilly—"Are you not striving to cheat me, from an idea of relieving my mind of a heavy weight? Are you not, in mistaken mercy, endeavouring to delude me into a false belief?"—The Squire was confounded; he could not comprehend her meaning; and, taking her wasted hand in his, he solemnly assured her of the truth of all which he had told her. A faint shriek, as though she had been smitten by a

sudden pang, escaped from my lady's lips; and she fell back heavily, exclaiming; 'Rather tell me that all is lost—while I have a roof to cover me, there shall be your home—say, oh, say, that every thing is swept away, and that of all which was once yours, your child alone is left—tell me this, and if indeed I am not yet beyond the reach of happiness, I may still feel it in the belief that, by the sacrifice of myself, I have saved my father!' Would to heaven, sir, that the squire had left my mistress in this delusion: but alas! he did but insist the more that he would rather die than deceive her. While he was yet speaking, the feeble form of the invalid became imbued with sudden strength; she sat firmly and uprightly in her seat, and not a nerve quivered, as she listened with a calm intensity to the assurance of her father: when he ceased speaking, she sat for a moment in silence, and then, in a low and hoarse tone unlike her own sweet voice, she asked hurriedly: 'Is there then no mortgage so weighty upon your entire pro-

perty as to preclude all possibility of its release? Have you not, for my sake, ventured upon a speculation which involved all your earthly possessions, and made yourself a beggar?' One word only replied to both questions, as, fixing his wondering eyes upon her, the Squire answered—"Never!" That, sir, was my lady's death-blow—striking her hands suddenly together with frightful violence, she flung herself from the chair to her knees, shrieking at the pitch of her voice—'I see it all! I see it all! I am the victim of a lie! Now let me die—now let me pass away, and be forgotten—happiness and I have parted company for ever—'"

Susan had hitherto suppressed her sobs, but they now burst forth unrestrainedly; while Howard, who had long been sitting with his face buried in his hands, did not move a limb.

"I had better finish my story, sir:" said Susan at length, as she wiped away the large tears which were rolling down her cheeks, with her apron: "we could not raise my lady from

her knees until she had acquainted the squire with her secret—you may guess its nature, Mr. Howard, by the questions which she had asked: the poor young lady had believed herself to have been the means of saving her father from ruin, and this thought had hitherto upheld her. Now, however, she was undeceived too late, and the shock was too mighty for her failing strength—before the morning Mr. Daubigny was a father, but the Squire was childless—"

Howard sprang from his seat; and traversed the floor with hurried and unequal steps; for a time he made no effort to subdue the emotion which covered his brow with the damp of the grave, but, at length, he waved his hand impatiently, and Susan instantly comprehending the meaning of the signal, resumed her narration.

"The house of death was in a few hours loud with violence, Mr. Howard; for the soul-stricken father poured forth the curses of a broken heart on the destroyer of his child—ere

she expired, she spoke of you, sir: in her delirium she called on you—in her agony she remembered you—and your name was on her dying lips. My lady's death was the first link in a long chain of sorrow—my own old, gray-haired mother went next, and the vault of the Mardens opened within a twelvemonth to receive the remains of the good Squire.—It is bold of me to talk of myself, sir:" continued Susan, after a pause; alarmed at the violent anguish of her listener, and anxious to divert his thoughts into a less painful channel: "and yet I may as well finish my story.—The Elms, as you may believe, was no home for me after my lady's death: a nurse from some distant town came to take charge of the infant, and all who had loved Mrs. Daubigny were dismissed from the squire's service. I went with the rest, sir; but I had no home, and I was only too glad to become the wife of one who had long wished to marry me, but for whom I never could persuade myself to leave my young mistress.

He was a hard-working, industrious lad; the son of one of Mr. Daubigny's tenants, and had been groom to Squire Marden until the death of the poor old gentleman. Both James and I had saved a little money, and the new owner of Marden, who was a third cousin of the squire's, and a stranger in this part of the country, kindly consented to let this cottage to us at a low rent, out of respect to Sir Willoughby and Lady Bransdon, who were kind to me for the sake of my dead lady; and we might have done tolerably well, sir, for James worked for his father, and I took in needlework, and we were happy and contented; but Mr. Daubigny suddenly took the farm out of the hands of my father-in-law, under the excuse that he meant to farm it himself, and my husband was consequently thrown out of employment; the old man contrived to manage a smaller concern with the assistance of his unmarried sons; and although James worked hard whenever he could obtain a job, and gave

satisfaction to his employers, still he was but one among many, constantly on the look out for employment, and he was idle half his time. Idleness, sir, may well be called the root of all evil; for the want of occupation, the sting of poverty, and a spite which he unfortunately nourished against Mr. Daubigny for having wilfully ruined his prospects, at length induced my misguided husband to join a band of poachers. Oh, sir—if you were to know the sorrowful days and the sleepless nights which this madness cost me—but it was in vain that I entreated him to abandon so sinful and dangerous a pursuit: he grew from silent to sullen, and from sullen to violent; I dared not persist, sir, for I knew too well that it was to injure me that Mr. Daubigny had wronged my husband; and I dreaded lest he should reproach me with this. Temporary success only served to render the band with which my ill-fated James had connected himself, more daring and less cautious; and as Mr. Dau-

bigny was the principal sufferer, so was he also the most resolute to bring the offenders to justice; neither fur nor feather was ever touched on the Marden estate, for, although it had changed masters, still was the memory of the old squire so revered in the neighbourhood, and his many charities so warmly remembered, that even the wild youths who were nightly committing depredations on the lands of Mr. Daubigny, forbore to force a fence of the Marden property. At length, sir, the evil to which I had long looked forward burst upon me—five of the band were apprehended, and among these was my unhappy James—I was then in a situation little calculated to enable me to combat such a misfortune, and never shall I forget my sufferings during the period of his trial; I knelt to Mr. Daubigny, I implored of him to have mercy alike on me, and on my unborn babe; but I appealed in vain: he who had not mercy on those who were most dear to him, had no feeling for me

and mine—sternly, bitterly, he drove me from him: he would not listen to my pleadings; he was deaf to my entreaties; and when my wretched husband next looked upon me, it was in a common jail——Oh, sir,—there is no sorrow like that which is born of shame. I had before suffered much, very much: I had followed my last parent to the grave. I had wept beside the coffin of the early dead—I had seen my hopes wither around me; had borne sickness, and poverty, and neglect—but shame was now come upon me for the first time, and that was the heaviest blow of all. I had borne all else patiently, but this sorrow was the saddest I had known; forgive me that I am tedious, sir; but when I look back upon that period of my life, I dwell on it until I am grateful that for my child's sake I was enabled to out-live it. I have one more grief to tell; one which I must learn to bear with patience, for it is beyond all earthly remedy—my boy, sir—my poor fatherless,

mindless boy. I became a mother amid such misery of mind that the anguish of his birth was almost a providence, for it withdrew my thoughts from the constant contemplation of my bereavement; but, alas! I soon discovered that while I had gained an object on which to lavish my affection, I could never hope to enjoy from it either companionship or sympathy; my child was an idiot! The trials which I had undergone, while they had failed to destroy me, had withered him—he has but one feeling in common with his kind, and that is love for his poor desolate mother; my neighbours point at him as he passes their cottages, and call him Idiot Jemmy, and say that the wizard grand-dame and the poaching husband were the dark seed from whence sprang the simple stripling: but I am callous to their taunts, Mr. Howard; nor can their mocking gibes render the idiot-son less dear to his sorrow-stricken mother. He is my all, sir—the one hope of my existence—the one thought

of my days of labour and watchfulness:—and sometimes, when I try to believe it possible that I may chance to outlive the term of my poor husband's transportation, I venture to pray, upon my bended knees, that a ray of light may be allowed to dawn upon his darkened brain, and that, ere he is clapsed in his father's arms, he may be as other children are—ready to smile at joy, and to sigh at sorrow."

"Father will never come back," broke in the wild voice of the idiot boy, as Susan paused; and Howard involuntarily started as the soulless, ringing tones fell upon his ear: "he is over seas, and there is no home for him here."

"Woe is me!" sobbed out the afflicted mother; "you say too truly, Jemmy, that there is no home for him here: but times may mend, my poor, stricken child, and we may yet make a happy hearth for the wanderers."

"They shall mend, Susan, they shall

mend;" murmured Howard; "at least the misery of want you shall never again experience—the sorrows which are heart-seated, I am too well aware that the aid of man cannot alleviate, but those which grow out of the every day necessities of the world are not beyond remedy—to these I can at least offer an antidote—to gold, Susan, I was once weak enough to look for happiness—in gold I have vainly sought for enjoyment and forgetfulness—from gold I may yet derive the blessedness of contributing to the comfort of others:—we have each pursued a phantom—and such is the common lot of mortality—we have both been disappointed, and this again is the destined fate of man: it behoves us therefore to awaken from the vain dream in which we have severally indulged, and to struggle as we may against the waking miseries of our lot."

"Heaven bless you, sir," sobbed the poor woman: "it does me good to hear you—oh, that my boy could understand you, and profit

by your words—the very sight of you brings back the memory of earlier and brighter days; though you are changed, sir, sadly changed—there is time upon your cheek, and suffering upon your brow, but your heart is untouched: you have still a tear for the wretched, and a kind counsel for the weak of purpose."

"Would that they were of more avail;" said Howard sadly: "but you have yet more to tell, Susan—wherefore did Daubigny consent to part with his only child?—the child of his martyred wife?"

"Ah! sir, the squire grew from bad to worse; while my young lady lived, he made her existence a misery to her, between his fits of passionate tenderness, and his paroxysms of bitter and scornful taunt—when she died, he wept her like a maniac—but, when she was lost to him beneath the cold earth, he lived as though he had never known the fellowship of virtue and gentleness; The Elms became the scene of riot and dissipation; crowds of beauty were yet

there, bolder and brighter beauty than that of my angel mistress, but the virtue which was lovely in her, was wanting in her successors—the house became a proverb in the county, and at length my lady Bransdon summoned resolution to brave the presence of the wanton associates of her brother, in order to save his child; after a long and painful discussion, Mr. Daubigny complied with her request, and she carried away the daughter of her dead friend—from that day the last restraint was removed from the mind of the callous father; song and laughter echoed through the avenues of that once tranquil place, and gibe and jest were the business of the livelong day. At length The Elms were deserted; a steward was appointed to superintend the tenantry, and the Squire departed no one knew whither; and long and weary years passed over ere he returned. Tongue cannot tell, sir, how changed he was when he came back; and he had aged more than twice the time could have aged him,

had not care kept pace with it. There were furrows in his cheek, and wrinkles on his brow, and the gray was visible among the dark locks which clustered about it. Nor did he come alone : a stranger tall and stern, imperious in her manner, and haughty in her demeanour, was the companion of his journey. Oh ! sir, it was a bitter day on which I discovered that this woman had assumed the place of my pure and angel lady—that she filled her seat at the board, and raised the voice of uncompromising authority, where the soft and gentle accents of persuasion had alone been heard. It is said that this woman knows the secret of Mr. Daubigny's exile ; that she taunts him with unguessed at crimes, and indulges in dark hints from which he recoils with terror ; and worse than all else, sir—the diamond necklace which had so long been an heir-loom in the house of Marden, and which belonged of right to my lady's child, was sold to purchase some hateful bauble for this modern Jezebel. I

know it, sir," gasped Susan, whom the memory of this, to her the most atrocious of all Daubigny's misdoings, had literally robbed of breath; "I learnt it from the messenger who was intrusted with its delivery to the purchaser—and Miss Mary's infant is robbed of her richest inheritance."

"Not so, good Susan, not so," said Howard, as he put his hand into his bosom, and drew forth the antique casket of which mention was made in the early portion of our tale, and threw back the lid to display to the astonished woman the nuptial necklace of her late mistress: "the daughter of Mary Marden must not be defrauded of her birth-right — By a strange chance I recognized and possessed myself of this most precious relique, and my dearest remaining duty is to restore it to its rightful owner."

Never did miser gloat over his gold, as did Susan over the recovered jewel; she looked up from the casket towards Howard, and from

Howard down again upon the casket; she was never weary of turning the glittering ornament in the sun-light, and watching the thousand colours which were flashed back in lightning; and even the wild laughter of her idiot-boy whom the unwonted spectacle had allured from his employment, failed to arouse her from the deep train of thought into which the sight of this long lost treasure had betrayed her.

"Poor boy!" said Howard kindly, as he stroaked back the long locks of the lad from his brow, and gazed commiseratingly into his vacant countenance, now feebly lit up by the slender ray of intellect which glimmered like an *ignus fatuus* in his bewildered brain; "you, at least, are ill fitted to contend with the wants and cares of life, and mine shall be the task to protect you from their evil influence —you are a brave boy in heart, for you love your mother, and your love shall be rewarded— henceforth I adopt you as my son—your weakness, and your affliction will but make you

more dear to a broken spirit and a withered heart!"

"I love you;" said the idiot, smiling in the face of the speaker, and possessing himself of the caressing hand; "I love your low voice, and your soft eyes, and it does me good to see that there are tears in them, for I thought that no one cried but mother, when she gives me all that she has, to stay my hunger, and while she fasts herself, weeps when I ask for more."

"Hush, Jemmy, hush," said the woman soothingly, "you disturb the gentleman;" but the boy only crept the closer to his new friend.

"Don't leave us," murmured the urchin, encouraged by the ready protection which was extended to him; "mother shall work for you, and I will walk with you in the green woods, among the leaves and the birds, and the wild flowers; where the brook dances in the light, and the cattle low one to the other in the twilight, and the hedge-blossoms open their cups to the dew, and then offer it to the moon—

will you come?" and again the laughter, which was far more soulless than his words, pealed out its mockery of joy.

"Not now, Jemmy, not now," whispered his mother.

"To-night then," pursued the boy, "let it be to-night—we have stars here, bonny bright stars, which shine blithely on the graves, and I love to watch them as they wink their eyes in mockery of the dull earth they look on—and we have our lady moon too, shining among the clouds like a silver ball, and throwing her slender threads over the trees and the streams, and laying her own white shroud over the grave stones till they glitter like yon bright thing which mother holds in her hand—let it be to-night."

"Not to-night, Jemmy, you know how often I chide you for your night wanderings;" said Susan. "It is a frightful fashion, sir," she added, addressing Howard, "which he has adopted of escaping from the house, and roam-

ing no one knows whither until day-break; it is a double grief to me, for I not only tremble for his safety, but I am too conscious that his malady is encreased by this strange practise; many a dreary winter night have I spent in pursuit of him over field, and wood, and valley, and among the shrubberies of Marden."

"Be patient, my good lad," said Howard kindly; "to-day I must travel too far to make you my companion; but, fear not, we will have many a stroll together; you shall shew me your favorite haunts, and I will endeavour to awaken your mind to a sense of the Great Cause of all which is bright and beautiful about you:—and now, Susan, let me partake of your cottage fare—I care not though it be both coarse and scanty, I seek only to sustain nature, and I would fain spend a few solitary hours among the woods of Marden, ere I proceed to The Elms."

"To The Elms!" echoed Susan; "oh, Mr. Howard, what can tempt you to visit The Elms?"

"It is no temptation," said Howard with a sad smile: "I go, Susan, to fulfil a duty, to perform a mental compact—that done, I will return, and be to you and to your boy, all that I have promised."

Still Susan was not satisfied, a deep gloom settled on her brow, and she stood for a moment buried in thought. "The Squire is a mysterious man, sir," she said at length; "there are dark tales told of him in the neighbourhood; no blessing ever rests upon his head; the poor are strangers at his gate, and the rich at his board: a curse is on all which belongs to him."

"Not all, not all," gasped Howard convulsively, "remember his sinless child—the innocent one whose life was bought with *her's*—the bequest of the spotless mother who died in making it."

Susan answered with tears.

"No man was ever all evil," pursued Howard; "and I trust that I may yet awaken

better feelings in the breast of the widowed husband—it is at least my duty to restore to him that portion of his daughter's property, of which, in a moment of madness, he ventured to deprive her. If he have, indeed, led the life that you describe, the motherless girl will only the more require my friendship, nor will I be a niggard in bestowing it: where can I more worthily bequeathed my wealth than on the child of the only woman whom I ever loved?"

Susan ventured no further remonstrance, but turned away, and busied herself in preparing the humble meal of her unexpected guest; while the boy, still clinging to the hand of Howard, took up the broken thread of their conversation, and murmured confidentially:—

"Never heed her, sir, never heed her; The Elms is a bonny green spot; I go there bytimes, for I like to hear the wind whistle among the tall trees, when they bow their proud heads, as I do mine to the gentry, when they cross my path; but mother chides me if I go

there, and I never let her find me among the bushes, when she comes by, shouting my name till the very birds of the air could call me by it, if they had tongues: no, no, I can hide like a hare when I list to do so, among the fern and the tall grass—and I will shew you where it grows rank and rich, and where Squire Daubigny himself could not hunt us out."

"Do not run the risk, my good boy:" said Howard; "I would not anger the Squire by such a trespass."

"*You* would not anger the Squire;" echoed the idiot with a sudden scowl, so dark and strange that Howard was startled by the utter change which it wrought in his whole appearance; "and why should you fear to anger the Squire? no good man fears him—and will not I watch over you? and if he touch but one hair of your head, is not the curse ready? the curse?" and the scowl fled, and the chuckling laughter awoke again, as the boy sprang from his side, the prey of a new fancy.

The scanty breakfast had been prepared while this short dialogue was taking place, and Howard, sick and weary at heart, and panting for that solitude which alone could restore his mental calm, hastily partook of the humble meal; and then, placing in the hands of his hostess, a well-filled purse, he bade her render her abode less desolate against his next visit. His leave-taking was brief: the idiot-boy, once more absorbed in his original employment, rather gibbered than spoke his farewell; and Susan's salutation was scarcely more wordy. She stood respectfully on her threshold as Howard mounted his horse, and when he rode off she entered the cottage less elated by her sudden accession of wealth, than depressed by the knowledge that her benefactor was about to visit him whom she ever considered as her lady's murderer: "Strange!" she murmured half audibly; "that the prophecy should ring in my ears at this particular moment—" and

then, as if involuntarily, she repeated beneath her breath :—

"When the first false heart wooes at Marden Hall,
A dame shall rise, and a king shall fall ;
When a fairer than she by a lie is won,
A deed of blood shall be dared and done !"

CHAPTER II.

So long did Howard indulge his solitary thoughts, that the glorious sun had partially declined, ere he prepared to emerge from the well-remembered shades of Marden. Every haunt with which he had once been familiar, every tree beneath whose branches he had sat with Mary, every spot on which he had seen her foot press down the yielding grass, demanded its tribute of remembrance, and it was freely paid. If he wept amid his wanderings, who shall chide the weakness? He was alone, and

no cold eye rested upon those heart-wrung tears. Years had passed over him, and they had marbled his hair, and bent his brow, but the wound in his heart was yet unhealed ; time, and travel, danger and hardship, had alike failed to medicine to the diseased mind ; and the first spring of affection which had welled so freely forth in the summer of his life, yet flowed on deeply and silently.—Howard had never been the child of luxury and indulgence—he had been born amid sorrow, nursed in poverty, and reared in self-denial. The horizon of his fortunes had been gloomy, and the first light, which had dawned upon them, had never been extinguished. Wealth had come upon him, but the one brightening principle of the heart, the one hâlo of the spirit which had shed its earliest beam over his solitude, had absorbed every lesser joy ; before this one dream he had bowed all his energies, and even when he was rudely awakened, those prostrate powers of feeling sprang not back from the pressure. In years he was a man, but

in heart he remained a youth. His mind had progressed, but his spirit continued unchanged.

To such a nature, who can mete out the aggregate of misery which may be crowded into one short day? While other eyes were on him, and other voices answered to his own, Howard could compel his feelings to that semblance of calm which cheats the crowd into a belief that all within is peace, even while every nerve quivers, and every pulse beats almost to bursting; but had any, who were so deceived only a few hours previously, looked upon Howard as, once more mounting his horse, he turned his bridle-rein towards The Elms, how fearfully would the fallacy of their belief have been made apparent! His large eye was bloodshot, his lips were livid, the lines upon his brow were more deeply indented, and there was an expression of subdued and silent anguish engraven upon every feature of his fine countenance, which told a tale of suffering.

Nor might an attentive observer have failed

to detect the presence of acute mental anguish in the very movements of the ill-fated Howard; in the sudden violence of the pace to which he urged his generous horse, and the equally sudden manner in which he drew in his bridle, and suffered the noble animal to creep as it were mechanically along, with bent head and dull eye. The brightness of the golden sun-set, the rich foliage of the over-hanging trees, the gleaming of the yellow light upon the rippling stream which, like a golden thread, ran sparkling beside the path; all were alike unheeded. The cloud of sorrow had veiled from his sight the beautiful in nature, and he looked on it as one who saw it not.

In this mood did Howard reach The Elms; but as the iron gates of the Park closed behind him, he collected himself by a violent effort, and again the pale brow grew placid, and the melancholy eye strayed hither and thither over the fairy scene around him. Nothing was changed of all which he so well remembered

save in an increase of beauty. The stately trees had become still more majestic and umbrageous; the noble pile had assumed a deeper shade of that peculiarly soft time-tint, which renders the antique architecture so strikingly attractive, and lends to it the last touch of interest; and the flowering shrubs, richly and picturesquely grouped, were shedding their sweet breath on the low, sighing breeze, which was musical with the song of the wild birds. It looked the very abode of happiness and peace—and yet the wanderer sighed at the conviction that sorrow and strife had alike abided in that place of beauty!

Howard had scarcely reached the portal, when a servant of foreign mien, and dressed in a gorgeous, and rather gaudy livery, stood at his stirrup, and requested his name.

"It would avail little to declare it:" said Howard, calmly; "if Mr. Daubigny be within, and can grant an interview of some half hour to a stranger, I will intrude upon him so long.

I will thank you to inform him that I wait."

The servant bowed respectfully, overawed by the commanding manner of the stranger; and a few moments only had elapsed ere he returned, and summoning a groom to take charge of the horse, led the way to a small library which opened from the hall.

The first glance sufficed to prove to the accustomed eye of Howard that it was the exterior only of The Elms which remained unchanged; from within, all the massive and costly ornaments, which had been so stately in their antiquity, were swept away, and re-placed by the gaudy and meretricious gew-gaws which bespoke a coarse and vulgar taste. The very books which were scattered through the apartment, and crowded the sofas and tables, were of a character displeasing to the high principles of Howard; while the more valuable works, which were ranged untouched along their respective shelves, were dusty and discoloured from long disuse. He had ample time to linger over the

changes which had taken place, for the light grew fainter in the apartment while he was yet alone; and, as he slowly paced to and fro the floor, a rush of recollections, each more gloomy and harrowing than its predecessor, crowded over his brain. The hour was in unison with his melancholy; and he started, almost with regret, when he heard the door open softly behind him, and saw a dark figure enter the apartment, followed by a servant bearing lights.

Had Howard crossed the path of the person who now advanced towards him without a hint of his identity, he would assuredly have never recognized in the figure before him the Daubigny, whose image, like a stain on marble, he had never been enabled to wipe from the tablet of his memory. The elasticity and springiness, for which he had once been so remarkable, had been succeeded by a look of strength and muscular power, of which the slight and elegant figure of is early life had never given promise; and

which was so strikingly articulated that it conveyed the immediate impression of its having been produced by extraordinary physical exertion. But the change was less remarkable in the form, than in the face, of Daubigny, as he stood calmly before his visitor, unexcited by emotion, and untouched by passion. A cold and repulsive haughtiness sat upon his brow, which was smooth and unlined as marble; his eye seemed to slumber beneath its heavy lid, as though the fire which had once lived in its dark orb had died away, while his well-cut lips were slightly compressed, and wore that rigidity of expression which bespoke resolute and determined decision.

To a stranger, the personal appearance of Daubigny, such as we have described him, would have conveyed a decidedly favourable impression. He would have read in that finely modelled face no meaner characteristic than that of a haughty indolence, careful of its own luxury and enjoyment, and reckless of the warring wants of others. But the lion slumbered in his lair!

No hand (to use the beautiful image of Scott) was now upon his mane! The storm-cloud yet slept in the still twilight.

A cold and imperious bow was the opening courtesy between the two individuals who, as the servant closed the door behind him, stood intently regarding each other. For a moment there was silence, for Howard, as his eye met that of the man who had blighted his existence, felt wholly unable to address him; while Daubigny gazed with vague curiosity on the noble-looking stranger who had volunteered so singularly-timed a visit. He recovered himself however in an instant, and motioning his guest to a chair, sank silently into one which stood beside himself with an expression of calm enquiry in his dark eye.

The appeal was answered, but the accompanying courtesy was for the moment declined, and Howard, looking steadily towards his host, calmly asked :—

"Reginald Daubigny, have you then forgotten me?"

Daubigny started from his seat; the lion was aroused--the storm-cloud had burst—the careless glance had failed to detect the presence of his hated rival, but the ready ear was a more jealous agent, and he was instantly conscious of the identity of the individual who stood before him. Then, indeed, the fire flashed from his large eyes, and the blood mantled on his pale forehead, as he struck his clenched hand upon the table beside which he stood, and muttered a curse between his clenched teeth which sprang from his heart's core.

"It is well, sir;" he said with a contemptuous laugh, as he turned full upon his unmoved companion; "it is well—this interview has been of your own seeking—you were warned when we last stood face to face on the green sward—you must now abide the result of your own boldness—wherefore came you here? she whom you once thought to seduce from her duty is dead; her ear can hearken no more to your pernicious flatteries—she is in her grave

—but I yet live to revenge my wrongs upon the daring hypocrite who would have invaded the very citadel of my affections."

"Daubigny," said Howard solemnly; "I came not here to arouse the slumbering demon of hatred within your breast—let the fierce passion slumber—its sainted cause exists no longer. Nor came I to force upon you the memory of one whose name must be unwelcome to your ears. I am deluded by no phantom of after-fellowship and good-faith; we were not made to tread the same path. Had my errand been other than it is, I would have deputed to its performance some uninterested person, who might have spared to each of us the pang of looking upon the other—but I shrank from the meanness of prostrating even your pride, by causing a blush of self-accusation to tinge your cheek in the presence of one who knows you not as I do."

"Insolent madman!" gasped Daubigny, who had with difficulty compelled himself to hear

Howard to an end: "think not that it is in your power to raise any emotion in my bosom save that of undying contempt, and withering hatred;—would you venture, on the strength of the paltry wealth of which you have become the master, to beard me under my own roof? Is the pauper-parson so thoroughly forgotten in the purse-proud heir? Not by others, Mr. Howard, not by others—the crowd have long memories, nor can the world be hood-winked by a handful of gold! Fool that I was, that I did not strangle you like a viper, when you first crossed my path! Idiot as I am, not to crush you now, when you stand before me like a man of ice, smiling at the tempest you have raised, and unconscious how soon the bolt may strike! But I am not to be thus braved, sir: I may have been forbearing—I have—I sacrificed my own just indignation to the feelings and prejudices of others—now I am a free man—Death has been busy about me—the links with which my softer impulses had fettered me have been

torn away—the ivy has been rent from the oak —I stand alone."—

"This violence is needless, Mr. Daubigny:" was the rejoinder of Howard: "these threats are empty; had I feared you, I had not now been beneath your roof—firm in the consciousness of my integrity of purpose, I am not to be turned aside by a few hot words, nor a burst of unnecessary insult—listen to me with the same patience as that which I have bestowed upon your own address, uncompromising as it has been; for this poor courtesy at least, you owe to a guest, even an unbidden one."

"Speak on, sir;" sneered Reginald. "I have borne much with which you have been connected; one infliction more or less signifies little."

Howard bowed coldly, and resumed: "It were idle in me, deeply as I was a sufferer by your falsehood, to reproach you with the lie by which you robbed me of the woman—"

"Now, by the eternal Heavens—" shouted

the infuriated Reginald, as he sprang to the side of the speaker.

"I claim your promise, Mr. Daubigny:" said Howard withdrawing a few paces: "hear me out; and then I will meet you on your own terms, if they be such as a man of honour and a gentleman may be at liberty to accept."

"Why this transcends!" exclaimed Daubigny violently—"But I am to blame;" he added superciliously: "thus to be chafed by the buzzing of an insect—I listen, sir—my turn will follow." And as he ceased speaking, he flung himself with affected listlessness into his seat.

"Be the punishment of that lie left to the agency of your unslumbering conscience,—to the gnawing of the worm which never dies—to that Great Power who judges all men by their actions—how little it hath availed you, let your own heart acknowledge."

"It availed me at least to the contentment of that heart:" broke in the impetuous Daubigny; "I became the husband of the woman

whom I loved, and I ground to dust the spirit of the man I hated!"

"Was it necessary to add yet another act of dishonour to the dark catalogue?" pursued Howard, careless of the interruption: "to wrong the motherless child, even as you had wronged the broken-hearted wife?"—

"Who shall dare to imply that I have wronged my child?" demanded Daubigny with a look and tone of fury.

"Even I—" was the resolute answer: "wrongs not that man his pure and innocent child who makes her infancy the plaything of the dissolute, and her girlhood the companion of wantons? from whose roof she is snatched by those who love her, as from infection; by whose intemperance she is banished from her natural home, and rendered yet more miserably an orphan? Wrongs not that man his child who disposes of the last bequest of a dead mother to her infant, to bestow its proceeds on some shameless and abandoned

woman, whose meretricious charms are too powerful for his principles of natural affection and moral rectitude ?—And doth he do no wrong towards his child—"

"Am I a boy to be tutored thus?" once more demanded Reginald fiercely : "what means this interference? what know you of me, and of my family arrangements? by what authority do you accuse me of compromising the interests of my daughter?"

"By one which cannot be gainsaid :" said Howard ; "by this—" and he drew forth, and exhibited to the astonished Daubigny the diamond necklace.

"Juggler ! imposter ! fiend !" cried the excited and furious Reginald, fastening his fascinated gaze upon the jewel ; "the bauble was mine—mine to retain or to dispose of, as I saw fit—mine by right, as the husband of Mary Marden—and am I to be schooled that I took the wiser part, and exchanged the toy for gold?"

"I am not prepared to dispute the legality of the act;" said Howard, in an accent of withering contempt: "I speak only of its want of justice and generosity. I ask only that you will even thus tardily repair the injury.—"

"Spare your sarcasm, sir;" retorted Daubigny; "I needed money, and parted from the jewel; you had gold to spare, and purchased it—close the casket, and glory in the poor and pitiful triumph of profusion over poverty."

"You mistake my meaning, Mr. Daubigny:" replied Howard calmly: "my heart has too long been a stranger to all exultation to be satified with so paltry an advantage; you are well aware that I am an isolated man; that I stand alone in the world; the last of my race. You know also where the desolate spirit sought to make for itself an abiding-place while it was yet young enough to hope—the chain was indeed rudely snapt asunder, but its links were

too firmly knit around my heart to be torn away; think you that *her* child is not dear to me as my life's blood—dearer than ought else on earth can ever be? Daubigny; once more I say that you have mistaken my purpose. I am aware that my name is hateful to you—I ask not that it should be otherwise—I would not delude you by empty sophistries or specious arguments—but boldly, fearlessly, I ask of you, for the sake of your dead wife—of her whom we both loved—to restore to her child, even though it be through my means, a treasure which she valued beyond all else—concede this, and I depart, never to cross your path again."

Daubigny did not immediately reply: he sat with his head resting upon his hand, and his subtle snake-like eyes rivetted upon his companion as though he mis-doubted the purport of a generosity of which he felt himself to be incapable. Every trace of passion had faded from his countenance, but deep, malignant, callous, cunning had succeeded—it was

the ground-swell after a storm,—the roar and hurry of the tempest had passed away, but the principle remained.

The inordinately selfish and unfeeling ever seek to detect a hidden and unworthy motive in the noble actions of the more high-minded and generous; they are unable to comprehend or to appreciate the spontaneous liberality which forms so striking a contrast from their own heart-searing principle of conduct; and yield reluctantly to the belief that the good deed may be done for its own sake, independently of any extraneous result.

Thus was it with Daubigny: "Either," he mentally argued in his worldliness of spirit: "either this man is a fool whom I could cajole out of his very inheritance, did I not hate him too bitterly to stoop to so poor a revenge; or he is a knave, crafty and cunning enough to deceive the subtlest spirit which ever owed its prosperity to its sinuosity of action. But the speculation is an idle one—the twig is

limed; the bird may flutter as he lists, what care I for his struggles?"

"This is a somewhat startling proposal, Mr. Howard"—he said, at length; and there was almost mockery in the accent, cold as it was, in which he addressed him: "a deed worthy of the age of knight-errantry;—men do not now-a-days so lightly bestow a jewel like the one you hold, without some far-searching purpose—my daughter is honoured by your princely intentions, but she is not to be bought with baubles."

Howard pressed his open hand heavily upon his forehead, as if to stay the beating of its pulses; and then sternly and rebukingly he spoke: "Man!" he said, "is it to me that you talk thus? I, whose life has been embittered, whose steps have been over a wilderness, and whose heart has wept blood through your means?—To me? can you look upon my brow, on which anguish has lain her iron hand, and burnt in her symbol as it were a brand—

can you raise your eye to my gray hairs, whitened by the misery which your own treachery brought upon me; and believe that my sufferings have taught me so little mercy that I can find a solace for them in a new victim? Look I like one whom the young and beautiful could love? Were the sigh of a stricken spirit meet echo to the laughter of a happy heart? are these wasted lips suited to the touch of loveliness?—Surely the veil must have been rent for years both from my eyes and from your own—mock me not then with so poor a taunt—insult me not by so groveling a suspicion."

There was an earnestness, almost a solemnity in the tone and manner of Howard which at once forbade all scepticism; and Daubigny felt that it was so; yet could not the narrow spirit of the libertine comprehend the perfect disinterestedness of his companion, and he only transferred his suspicions from his daughter to some less tangible object.

"You must pardon me, Mr. Howard;" he resumed, "that I have unwittingly wounded

your modesty, and touched a string which appears to vibrate painfully upon your somewhat excitable sensibilities—I will not revert to the inference which has so disturbed you; but will simply request to know by what other method Reginald Daubigny can ever hope to repay a profusion so unlooked for. Mine, sir, are the broken fortunes of a man who has not sought to slumber away existence; but who has followed willingly whithersoever a busy, and perhaps vagrant, fancy has been pleased to lead him; I can make no requital in kind; and I should have thought an exchange of civilities incompatible with our previous feeling towards each other, had you not taught me differently, —and now, what more, sir?"

"Little, very little—do you, or do you not consent to receive from my hands this, to me, useless jewel?"

There was a momentary pause; and then a change came over the countenance of Daubigny, and he laid his hand upon that of his companion as it rested on the casket;—"Ho-

ward," he said, and he spoke slowly, like one whose feelings over-mastered his utterance: "why have you sought me out? why have you repaid hatred with generosity, and taught me to regret the wilful overthrow of my ruined fortunes! Put up the jewel, at least for to-night—to-morrow we will talk of this again; and, until to-morrow, let my roof shelter you."

Howard hesitated: amid the overflowing benevolence of his heart, lurked one solitary drop of bitterness—it was hatred of the man who had been his enemy; and he shrank from passing a night beneath the roof of one whom in his secret soul he loathed and shrank from.

"Is this generous, is this manly, Howard?" asked Daubigny reproachfully, as he marked the reluctance of his guest: "you require at my hands the sacrifice of pride, and the extinction of animosity, and you hesitate to become my debtor for the poor boon of a

night's shelter! This, at least, is no encouragement to concession on my part."

"I am rebuked;" said Howard, grasping the hand which rested on his; "you are the father of *her* child, and it shall be as you wish."

Daubigny returned the pressure, and then moved away as if to conceal his emotion; had Howard however beheld the expression of that averted countenance, he would have forsworn his purpose—it was a look of malignant triumph, which might have lit up the features of a fiend; and of which words could never shadow out the bitterness—the clenched teeth ground against each other, and the deep breath came thick and laboured from between them, as though some fearful feeling grappled at the heart of the strong man, and would not be beaten back.

"We have hated long and fiercely, Howard;" said Daubigny, when he at length resumed the conversation; "but years have

passed over us both; nor have they passed without leaving their trace behind. We have both been wanderers in far lands, looking on strange faces, and listening to unfamiliar tongues. Should not time, which has changed our persons, have changed our hearts also? Shall we have struggled successfully against danger and hardships and fatigue—waged triumphant war against the knife of the savage, and the dagger of the brigand, only to succumb beneath the tyranny of our own passions? Rather let us foreswear our animosity, and become henceforth as brothers." And the subtle eye turned stealthily on the astonished Howard beneath its heavy lid, as though to mark unnoticed the effect of the proposal. But Howard did not immediately reply: single-hearted and honest as he was, there was something so startling and extraordinary, so inconsistent and unnatural, in this sudden change from violence to conciliation, that it smote even upon his unsuspicious nature. He looked

up; he fixed his eyes earnestly on the placid countenance of Daubigny, and the next moment he scorned himself that he had been ungenerous enough to doubt.

"I fear me;" he said sadly; "that such can never be—I forgive you, Daubigny, from my soul; but I will not conceal from you that your presence awakens in my breast sensations so painful, and memories so harrowing, that I am unequal to the trial. To know that we once more feel towards each other as men and as christians, will be the solacing reflection of my solitude; and should the occasion offer in which I may be enabled to serve any to whom *she* was dear, my best efforts, my best energies, shall ever be exerted to that effect. Be then our compact fulfilled—to-night, I am your guest—to-morrow, we part in courtesy and kindness."

"I accede to your arrangement—" said Daubigny, making a violent effort to subdue the feeling which would have prompted a far

different reply: "I have hitherto been a niggard host, but I will redeem my want of hospitality—" and taking up a small silver bell which lay on the table, he summoned a servant, to whom he gave the necessary orders; and ere long the supper was announced.

A singular and somewhat fluttered expression passed over the countenance of Daubigny as he rose from his chair; and, waving away the domestic who yet held the door open in his hand, he turned with an affectation of gaity towards his companion, and said in a light tone:

"Mr. Howard is without doubt too much a man of the world to object to the society of a fine woman; or to hesitate at taking his place at a table headed by such an one—I shall be proud to introduce him to a fair friend, who has taken compassion on my solitude."

Howard looked sternly at the speaker: "Mr. Daubigny;" he said: "after the desire which you have expressed for the existence of

a kindlier feeling between us, I cannot believe that it is your purpose to insult me--I am unwilling to imagine that you seriously purpose to shew me the seat of your pure and angel wife disgraced by a less worthy occupant—I am anxious to think that I have wronged you—"

"Be it as you please—" said the host with a forced and uneasy laugh; "excuse me for five minutes, and neither your morality nor your feelings shall be outraged—I am too happy to have you beneath my roof to cavil with you for straws—" and he hastily left the library.

An unsuppressed peal of scornful laughter reached the ears of Howard through the unclosed door, as the light and elastic tread of a female foot traversed the hall; in the next instant Daubigny returned, and led the way to the supper-room.

The meal was not of long duration; there was a restless feeling at either heart which forbade all hilarity, and almost deadened all conversation. The words fell listlessly from the

lips of both, for neither ventured to speak on the subject which engrossed his thoughts; and the hour was yet early, at which, pleading extreme fatigue, Howard rose, and intimated his wish to retire for the night. The feeble opposition of his host was readily overcome, and expressing his wish to depart by times on the morrow, he uttered his good-night and withdrew to his chamber.

Scarcely had he departed, when a small hand rested on the fastening of the door, and a fine, though faded face appeared at the entrance of the supper-room.

"May I venture in?" demanded a low voice scoffingly, as the female advanced, and moved towards a seat: "or am I to be exiled for an indefinite period?"

"Never were you more welcome, Amelia:" was the reply: "my bird is caged, and even your syren voice should never tempt me to unbar his prison-gates— I hate him, woman! the very air I breathe is polluted by his prox-

imity—and he has schooled me as though I were a stripling—and I, *I*, Amelia, have sat by, and borne it!"

"What! crouched the tyger calmly in his lair, while his natural enemy lorded it in his very teeth?" asked the female in a tone of taunt: "how often have I heard you swear that were he but once within your grasp—"

"And is he not so? is he not so? am I yet forsworn? Is not the fool even now slumbering beneath my roof, and dreaming of a morrow which he may never see?"

"Daubigny!" exclaimed the beautiful woman to whom he spoke, as her brow darkened, and her large eyes became dilated beyond their natural demensions: "this is madness! that you loathe this Howard I am aware—that you would injure him I know; but, remember, that in the words which you have just uttered, you have hinted—murder!"

"Have *you* become his advocate?" asked Daubigny: "you, whose very presence he

deemed pollution—you, whom he would spurn from him as though it were a noxious reptile—you, for whom I have become an alien from my family, and a reproach among my friends?"

His companion rose: she swept back the flowing ringlets which clung dark and glossy about her brow, and stood proudly before him. "Reginald;" she said, and there was a slight tremor in her voice which betrayed the existence of deeper feelings than she was anxious to express: "you might have spared alike the question and the insult:—if I be indeed the hateful cause of discord and estrangement—if the shame which you have brought upon me be reflected back upon yourself—at least let us not reproach each other—if for me you have resigned your child, and angered your connexions, forget not that I, on my side, have, for your sake, abandoned my country, forfeited my position in society, and become an alien from my friends. Reginald, have you indeed forgotten the promise of never-ending happiness with which you

won me? The high-sounding, but hollow, sophistries which perverted my better reason, and hood-winked my judgment? And have I ever until this hour uttered a complaint? Have I not felt my youth wither, my beauty fade, and my peace of mind depart, without a murmur? Reginald, let no reproach exist between us: we have deceived alike ourselves and each other—happiness is a species of moral aloe, it blossoms but once during an existence, and when it has shed its bloom it withers even to the very roots; for us that bloom is shed, Daubigny, and it were worse than vain to seek its renewal, yet may we spare each other; and, having mutually forsworn the world when it wooed us with its blandishments, let us not bewail it when it would reject our fellowship."

"Why then do you anger me, and thus urge me to reproach?"

"Because I would recal you to a better feeling—and that, guilty as I am myself, I shrink from looking on you with a colder eye than

that which now rests upon you—because, in short, I am a woman, and I love you still! Are you not every thing to me? country, and parent, and friend? And think you that I do not read in the expression of your brow this night a purpose which you dare not shape in words! Reginald—am I wrong?"

"Am I indeed every thing to you?"

"Look on me—" was the answer, as his companion bent over him, and gazed sadly and almost wildly around her: "can you not trace the sincerity of my affection even in the blight of the very beauty which you used to laud? can you look on me, and doubt the depth of my devotion? No, Reginald—the world may cast me off—the pure of heart may turn aside to avoid my contact—the idle may make me subject for a gibe—the dissolute for an insult—but you —you, for whom I have dared all this—you, the one dream of my girlhood—the object of my never-changing love, you, at least, should not wrong me by a suspicion—"

"Nor do I:" replied Daubigny firmly; "woman never better proved her devotion; but, Amelia, more may still be required of you—should you shrink, were I yet more deeply to test the love of which you boast?"

"Never!" exclaimed the proud beauty, as her large eye, dancing in light, rested unshrinkingly on the brow of her companion: "the very question is an injury."

"Nobly said, my own brave-hearted Amy!" returned Daubigny, as his subtle eye wandered over the apartment, to evade the gaze of her's; "and you shall not fare the worse for your devotion: the besetting sin of your sex is ambition, and yours shall be satisfied:—come, you shall be my Hebe, and I will pledge you in a bumper of Burgundy—I thirst to-night, Amelia: there is a fire in my throat and in my brain—here is a place beside me, and here is wine—look gay, and bear awhile with my humour—nay, nay, not your lute—I am in no mood for music—laugh if you will—I care not how long nor how

loudly—make merry, Amy—merry—jest, or gibe, I can bear, but not music: and order in more lights; these burn faintly, and to-night I would rather fire my own roof-tree than sit in darkness—what, are you churlish, that you will not eat? *He* ate of this fare, and that too like one who was making his last meal—*his last*—mark you that? It is awful to do any thing for the last time—"

"You are strangely excited, Reginald—"

"Amelia;" said Daubigny starting; "you have used the very words which years ago were addressed to me by my mother;—you may wonder that I remember them, for they were unimportant in themselves, but I *do* remember them, for the cause was even then in existence which has since produced its effect. But enough of this: do you, on your side, remember the false traitor who first betrayed our passion to your father? do you remember that he it was who brought down upon your young head that dying father's curse? Have you forgotten the

vow you made that, should the occasion offer, you would have a revenge as mighty as the injury ?"

" Am I yet stone?" asked the agitated woman: " shew me but the means of vengeance, and I will use them."

" Enough :" said Daubigny; " you have not yet forgotten—and think not that I am more supine—revenge is an attribute of our nature—it is the very instinct of the brute which turns and rends its assailant—and of what more account is the blood which it sheds than water? the thirsty earth drinks both the one and the other—and it is a poor fallacy, woman, that no grass grows upon the spot, and that the stain abides for ever—pshaw! 'tis a nursery tale—" And the speaker laughed wildly and fiercely, as the panic-stricken female quailed beneath his frantic violence. " We will *not* reproach each other :" he pursued, more calmly, after a momentary silence : " find but your enemy, and we will hunt him down—mine is *here*—and—but come,

Amelia, you are pale and trembling—the wine, the wine, love—and you shall pledge me in a health."

"Nay, Reginald, put away the wine;" said his companion: "you are in no mood to bear the excitement of such long and repeated draughts—even now you talk wildly, and are not aware of the import of the words you utter."

"Think you so?" exclaimed Daubigny fiercely: "knows the tiger the import of the growl which he utters over his prostrate prey? Listen to me, Amy—this accursed Howard has tendered alms to me, and sought to make me play the pauper to glut his own foul pride! Aye, by Heaven! You must remember the glittering bauble which I bartered for—no matter what—you must remember it—"

"I do—" said his companion in a subdued voice: "yet I knew not, Reginald, when I suffered you to sacrifice the jewel to my idle

vanity, that I was leading you to wrong your child."

"No more sentiment to-night, Amelia;" sneered Daubigny, as he filled up another goblet of wine, and emptied it at a draught; "I have already been schooled to the very height of my endurance—what think you, I ask, brought this poor fool beneath my roof? even to bestow upon my poverty the precious trinket which had been squandered by my profusion—to confer upon me an obligation—to render up to my child a heritage of which she had been dispossessed by the delinquency of her last parent; to teach me that his day of revenge was come, and that while he spared my body, he yet sought to wrench my heart—curse on the pious plotter! he knew my mood of old—he had not to learn where the armour of my pride was jointed—he could strike at the vulnerable spot, and stab me in my harness!"

"My dear Daubigny—"

"But I can pluck the arrow out—" pursued

Reginald, heedless of the interruption: "aye, ere it festers in the wound, I can apply a cure—my child *shall* possess the jewel, but it shall never be as the gift of Howard:—men may look coldly on me, and drop dark hints of my past life—*that* I can bear, for the world has been too long my puppet for me to chafe when another pulls the strings—but to be *his* debtor were to be more or less than man—his debtor! *his!* whom in early youth I sent forth a wanderer from his home; a heart-reft and isolated being, to whom the very music of nature was a rude discord, and whose pulses could never quiver again to the touch of joy—to be condemned to smile in gratitude on him, and to embalm in gracious words the hate and bitterness of my loathing spirit—*that* at least I cannot teach myself to achieve—"

"Refuse the boon, and part—" murmured the low voice of Amelia.

"As thou art a good catholic so shalt thou be canonized for thy tender mercy, Amy;"

said Daubigny with a bitter sneer; "and by the light of thy dark eyes, I pledge thee my faith that even so shall it be—the boon is already refused; it now only remains for us to part, and we *will* part—aye, so utterly that there shall be no fear of any future meeting."

"He will be hence by day-break, if I heard aright?"

"Ere then, ere then, fond one—there are yet three hours to the dawn: think you that he sleeps soundly? Poor fool! drawing deep breaths ere the pulsations of his heart cease for ever—how now, trembler? heard you never of one who died in his sleep? whose slumbers deepened into annihilation, and who left the world without the pang of parting? such things *have* been, and men have not even marvelled at them."

"Merciful Providence!" exclaimed his companion, convulsively clasping his arm, and looking earnestly into his eyes; "has not the shadow yet left thy spirit? Reginald Daubigny,

thy hand is not yet stained with blood—beware of the first spot—"

"Tush, silly girl!" said Daubigny fiercely; "white as is the palm which now presses yours it has done its work ere to day—nay, nay, it is not for you to shrink with that look of horror—how think you were you freed from the pursuit of the hot spirit to whom your dotard father had betrothed you? was he one to quail beneath the frown of a weak girl, and to be turned from his purpose by the empty threats of a rival? are you to be told *whose* blow it was that stilled the storm of his fiery passions, and turned their tide to ice?——Aye, wring thy dainty hands, and let the wild tears course each other down thy pallid cheeks, it is even so—and what of this! hast thou slumbered less softly in my arms, that they had wrestled with thine enemy? have my fingers wandered less lovingly among thy shining curls, that they had clutched the dagger which freed thee from thy threatened thraldom?

"Murderer!" gasped out the woman.

"So the world would term me;" was the cold rejoinder; "go, and proclaim me to that world; and you may at once be free to follow a new fancy—aye, and the blow which, for your sake, I did not shrink from striking with my own hand, will be given for you by deputy; the crowd will call it justice, and that which in me was sin, will in you be virtue."

"Reginald;" said the wretched woman sinking at his feet: "did you not sin for me? and is it from me that you should listen to reproach? were your palm dyed crimson, still is it the same hand which has clasped mine so often; which has pillowed my throbbing temples, and supported my trembling steps—I cannot chuse but cling to it." And even while she spoke, she pressed the open hand of Daubigny to her flushed and fevered brow.

"I could tell you more, trembler;" said Reginald, as he smoothed back the glossy braids from her forehead, which grew pale

beneath his touch; "but more were needless—you now know enough to be assured that I am not one to forego my vengeance; nor should you require it of me. If a poisonous reptile, or a loathsome weed cumber our path, do we not destroy the one, and up-root the other? Even now the reptile is in mine—and, Amy, he shall be crushed!"

The female hid her face upon his knees, and the convulsive sob, which is tearless, burst from her labouring bosom.

"I have told you—yes, woman as you are, I did not shrink from telling you, how madly I loved her who became my wife—but not when she was indeed such—the dream had been over for months ere she was called by my name, and men tendered the outstretched hand of congratulation to one whose heart was already embittered by the hatred which is undying. It was in her own sweet home that I loved her—in the bright days of her beaming girlhood—in the first blush of her angel beauty

—You are fair, very fair, Amy—I have worshipped your loveliness with no scant devotion—I have clung to *your* shrine, but I knelt to *hers*—"

A wilder sob burst from the heart of the stricken woman.

"As man can love but once, so loved I Mary Marden;" resumed Daubigny: "as man can hope but once, so hung I on the prospect of securing her young affections—and then *he* crossed me—*he* who now sleeps beneath my roof, and dreams that I have forgotten—it was a new face, and women—curses on their fickleness!—live but for novelty—he was poor too—and what is love without romance? he dared to think of her—to raise his eyes to that light which had long been to me even as a principle of existence—and,—but what boots it to dwell upon an oft-told tale? Though my love had grown to hate, I pursued my purpose — she became my wife—I won her with a lie—a glorious lie! for it revenged me on my rival—

and then she died—the world whispered that her disease was a broken-heart—she pined for her lost lover—and that same world, though it point the finger of scorn at you, my bright-eyed Amy, yet worshipped the mental adultress."

"And did they never meet again?" sobbed out the female.

"Nay, that had been poor vengeance;" replied Reginald with a bitter smile; "was she not mine? and think you that she ventured to scorn my power? But enough of this—the night wears, Amelia—look up—I am in no mood to contend with tears—let the baulked hunter weep when his prey escapes him—we should be merry, love, for ours is in the toils. The wine! Amy, the wine! you shall fill for me even to the brim, and then touch it with your lips:—why, what means that shaking hand—you would make a poor conspirator—and yet, on my soul, I do believe that you could wear a bold front if need were,

and that Reginald Daubigny were in jeopardy —I knew it, girl; there needed not that melancholy-looking smile to convince me of so palpable a fact—and now, a long, last draught, and we will terminate our meal; the household should sleep soundly after so late a vigil."

It was indeed far into the night when Daubigny and his wretched companion left the illuminated supper-room.

END OF VOL. I.

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